The Hudson Review

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: *Frederick Morgan*
EDITORS: *Joseph Bennett, Mary Emma Elliott*
MANAGING EDITOR: *Eva C. Young*
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: *Elizabeth J. Stillinger*

VOLUME XV, NUMBER 4 WINTER 1962-63

A Bouquet of Heads	E. M. CIORAN	491
Five Poems	LINCOLN KIRSTEIN	504
Beckett and the Contemplative Life	J. MITCHELL MORSE	512
Poems by: JEAN GARRIGUE, 525; DAVID WAGONER, 527; PHILIP MURRAY, 531; JOHN HOLMES, 533		
Christmas in Another Skin *(story)*	BEN MADDOW	534
Three Poems	MAY SWENSON	544
Translations from Gunnar Ekelöf	CHRISTINA BRATT and ROBERT BLY	546
The Little Red Discount House	BENJAMIN DE MOTT	551
Theatre Chronicle	JOHN SIMON	565
Ballet and Music Chronicle	B. H. HAGGIN	573
Film Chronicle	VERNON YOUNG	578
London Letter	JOHN WAIN	586
Reviews		
Fiction Chronicle	PATRICK CRUTTWELL	589
The Season's Difference	PAUL LEVINE	598
Doctors at Sea	ROGER SALE	605
A Return to Reality	CECIL HEMLEY	612
Inventing Oscar, An Unsolved Mystery	GERALD WEALES	620
Misprints on the Sands of Time	VIVIAN MERCIER	623
The Monster as Photographer	GEORGE P. ELLIOTT	627
Composers and Critics	B. H. HAGGIN	630
Index to Volume XV		637

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th St., New York 22, N. Y. Copyright © 1963 by The Hudson Review, Inc. Registered U. S. Patent Office. Second-class postage paid at Richmond, Virginia. Member of The Council of Literary Magazines and of The Association of Literary Magazines of America. Indexed in The International Index. Publication office: 1407 Sherwood Ave., Richmond, Virginia.

Reprinted With Permission of the Original Publisher
AMS REPRINT COMPANY, New York 3, New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Coming—in the Hudson Review:

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT: A Defense of Fiction

THORNTON WILDER: Bruno's Last Meal in *Finnegans Wake*

JOANNE GREENBERG: Summering *(a story)*

LEONARD B. MEYER: The End of the Renaissance?

LOUIS SIMPSON: The Marriage of Pocahontas

BEN MADDOW: Sad Seduction of the Teddy Bear *(a story)*

MARVIN MUDRICK: Colette, Claudine and Willy

PETER DALE SCOTT: Translations from Zbigniew Herbert

JOHN HOLLOWAY: David Jones

MARK TWAIN: Reflections on Religion

Poems by THEODORE ROETHKE, RICHMOND LATTIMORE, W. D. SNODGRASS, A. R. AMMONS, W. S. MERWIN, WILLIAM DICKEY, ETC.

Chronicles and Reviews by ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS, PATRICK CRUTTWELL, B. H. HAGGIN, NORMAN N. HOLLAND, VIVIAN MERCIER, ROGER SALE, JOHN SIMON, VERNON YOUNG, ETC.

Notes on Contributors

E. M. CIORAN is a Rumanian writer living in Paris. Praised by a wide range of critics from Alain Bosquet to Francois Mauriac, he has been called "the most original living French thinker," "the greatest French prose stylist since Valéry," etc. His first collection of brief essays, *Précis de Décomposition* (Gallimard), received the Prix Rivarol in 1949. The present selection of his work is from his second volume, *La Tentation d'Exister.*

MARTHIEL MATHEWS is co-editor, with her husband Jackson Mathews, of *Flowers of Evil,* a complete translation into English, by various hands, of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (New Directions).

LINCOLN KIRSTEIN has recently returned from a tour of the Soviet Union and Western Europe with the New York City Ballet, of which he is General Director.

J. MITCHELL MORSE teaches Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of *The Sympathetic Alien: James Joyce and Catholicism.*

DAVID WAGONER is a young poet who teaches at the University of Washington.

PHILIP MURRAY publishes poems frequently in big and little magazines. His first book of poems is in preparation.

The late JOHN HOLMES was the author of seven books, of which the most recent was *The Fortune Teller* (Harper).

BEN MADDOW's story, "In a Cold Hotel," which appeared in the Summer 1962 issue of this Review, will be included in the forthcoming volume of *O. Henry Prize Stories.*

A new book of poems by MAY SWENSON will be published in the Spring by Scribner's.

(Continued on Page 588)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

E. M. CIORAN

A Bouquet of Heads

Canny Old Socrates

If he had given us any precise notion of the nature of his demon, he would have squandered a good part of his glory. His canny caution stirred as much curiosity about him among the ancients as among moderns, and moreover allowed the historians of philosophy to dwell ponderously on a problem having nothing whatever to do with their real preoccupations. Socrates reminds us of another case: Pascal. The *Demon* and the *Abyss:* for philosophy these are two fetching weaknesses, two pirouettes. . . . The abyss in question, be it said, is, of the two, the least baffling. Nothing is more natural for a soul in open struggle with reason than to recognize the abyss and call on it for help. But was it natural for the inventor of the concept, the promoter of rationalism, to act on the authority of "inner voices"?

Such an ambiguity is useful all the same to a thinker who has his eye on posterity. We are not much bothered by a consistent rationalist: we guess what he is getting at, and leave him to his own system. Socrates was both calculating and inspired and knew very well what twist to put on his contradictions, to surprise and disconcert us. Was his demon purely psychological or did it correspond, on the contrary, to some profound reality? Was it of divine origin or was it only a response to some moral need? Did he really hear it or was it simply an hallucination? Hegel took it as a purely subjective oracle, with nothing outward about it; Nietzsche thought it was a comedian's trick.

How is it possible to believe that anyone, for a whole life-time, could play at being the man-who-hears-voices? To keep up such a role would have been a difficult if not impossible undertaking, even for Socrates. It doesn't matter, at bottom, whether he was ruled by his demon or merely used him for the cause! If he created him out of nothing, no doubt it was because he had to, if only to make himself inscrutable to others. As a solitary surrounded by followers, his first duty was to escape them by fencing himself off in mystery, feigned or real. How can you tell the difference between a real demon and a fake? Between a secret and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an apparent secret? How can we tell whether Socrates was really wandering or simply being foxy?

Yet, it is true that even when we are indifferent to his teaching, the talk he touched off about himself fascinates us. Was he not the first thinker to set himself up as a *case?* Was it not with him that the insoluble problem began: the problem of sincerity?

The Wrong Side of a Garden

When the problem of happiness replaced the problem of knowledge, philosophy had deserted its proper domain and taken up a suspect activity: an interest in man. . . . It was now completely absorbed in questions it would not have stooped to before, and it tried, with an air of great seriousness, to answer them. "How can we keep from suffering?" This, first and foremost, was the question to be answered. Philosophy had entered a phase of weariness: gradually turning away from its impersonal concerns, its desire to know, it gave up speculation. In place of disturbing truths, it set up comforting ones.

That was the sort of truth a ruined and enslaved Greece wanted from Epicurus; she was on the look-out for some restful formula, some remedy for anxiety. Epicurus was for his time what psychoanalysts are for ours. Did he not also, in his own way, denounce the "sickness of our civilization"? (In every confused and overrefined era, a Freud tries to unburden the soul.) With Epicurus, even more than with Socrates, philosophy shifted toward therapy. To heal, but above all to heal himself: that was his ambition. Although he wanted to deliver men from the fear of death and fear of the gods, he suffered from both fears himself. The ataraxia he prided himself on was not his ordinary state of mind: his "sensibility" was notorious. As for his contempt for the sciences—for which he was blamed later on—we know this is often characteristic of "wounded sensibilities." This theorist of happiness was a sick man. He vomited, so it seems, twice a day. In what misery he floundered, for so despising the "perturbations of the soul"! The little serenity he was able to manage was no doubt reserved for the benefit of his disciples. Grateful and naïve, they created his reputation for wisdom. Our own illusions being much feebler than those of his contemporaries, we easily see straight through to the wrong side of his Garden.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Saint Paul

We can never blame him enough for making Christianity an inelegant religion. For foisting off on it the most detestable traditions of the Old Testament: intolerance, violence, provincialism. With what indiscretion he meddles in things that are none of his business, about which he knows absolutely nothing! His pronouncements on virginity, abstinence and marriage are simply nauseating. In shaping our religious and moral prejudices, he fixed the norms of stupidity and multiplied the restrictions that still paralyze our instincts.

From the old prophets he took none of their lyricism, nothing of their elegiac and cosmic tone. What he took was their sectarian spirit and all their bad taste, the drivel, the crazy utterances for the benefit of the crowd. Morals interested him in the highest degree. He has only to mention them and you can see him vibrate with malice. He is obsessed by the city—the one he wanted to destroy as well as the one he wanted to build—and the relations between men and God interest him far less than those between men. Look closely at the famous *Epistles:* you will not find one moment of repose or delicacy, of contemplation or discrimination. Nothing but rage, huffing, lowbrow hysteria. There is no comprehension of the mind, the solitude of understanding. There are intermediaries everywhere, family ties, and the family spirit: Father, Mother, Son, angels, saints. There is not a trace of intellectuality, of definite concepts, nobody who wants to *understand*. Nothing but sins and recompenses, the bookkeeping of vices and virtues. His is a religion without questions, a debauch of anthropomorphism. I blush for the God he offers us. It is our duty to disqualify Him, but considering what He has come to, He is done for anyway.

Neither Lao-tse nor the Buddha appeals to an identifiable Being. Wary of the maneuvers of faith, they invite us to meditate, and, so that meditation should not run on in a vacuum, they fixed its object: the Tao or Nirvana. They had a different idea of man.

How can you meditate if you must always come back to an individual Being . . . even though He is Supreme? With psalms and prayers you are not looking for anything, you don't discover anything. People personify and implore the divinity out of laziness. When the gods began to seem insufficient, the Greeks woke up to philosophy; concepts began when the Olympians were finished.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To think is to cease venerating: thought is a revolt against mystery, a declaration of its bankruptcy.

The convert, when he adopts an alien doctrine, thinks he is taking a step toward himself, but in reality he is only side-stepping his problems. To escape the sense of insecurity that dominates him, he latches onto the first cause that comes along. And once in possession of "the truth," he wreaks vengeance on others for his old uncertainties, his old fears. Such was the case of that typical convert, Saint Paul. His grandiose airs scarcely covered up the anxiety he tried so unsuccessfully to control.

Like all neophytes, he thought his new faith would change his nature and resolve those doubts he was careful not to mention to his correspondents and his listeners. His game no longer deceives us, but countless minds at the time were taken in. True, it was a time when people were searching for "the truth," when they were not interested in *individual cases.* If our apostle was badly received at Athens, if he found himself amongst people who obstinately rejected his lucubrations, it was because there they still *argued* and sceptics, far from abdicating their position, still defended it. His Christian twaddle could make no headway in Athens, but to make up for that, it seduced Corinth, a city of the rabble, resistant to dialectics.

The common people want to be knocked on the head by invective, threats and revelations, smashing speeches: they love windbags. Saint Paul was such a one, the most inspired, the most gifted, the shrewdest in the whole of antiquity. The noise he made . . . we still get the echoes. He knew how to leap to the platform and bawl out his rage. Was it not he who introduced the tone of the market-place into the Greco-Roman world? The wise men of the time counselled silence, resignation, renunciation—ideas that were impractical. He, more adroit, came along with his enticing recipes, to save the riff-raff and demoralize the refined. His revenge on Athens was complete. If he had triumphed there, perhaps his hatred would have softened. Never has a defeat had such grave consequences. And if we are pagans . . . mutilated, blasted, crucified pagans, put through a profound and unforgettable vulgarity, a vulgarity two thousand years old, we owe it to that defeat.

A Jew-not-a-Jew, a perverted Jew, a traitor. The impression of insincerity emanating from his appeals, his exhortations, his vio-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lence, comes from that. He is suspect: he acts too *convinced*. You don't know where to take hold of him, how to define him: situated as he was at the crossroads of history, he certainly underwent many influences. After hesitating among numerous paths, he ended by choosing one, the *right one*. His sort know how to play the game: haunted by posterity, by the echoes their actions will set off, if they sacrifice themselves to a cause they do so as victims who will get results . . . *efficacious* victims.

When I am looking around for someone to take out a grudge on, I open the *Epistles* and right away I feel reassured. There is my man. He terrifies me, makes me shudder. To hate him *close on*, as a contemporary, I make a clean sweep of twenty centuries and follow him on his rounds. His success disheartens me, the tortures inflicted on him fill me with pleasure. The frenzy he arouses in me . . . I turn it against him: this was not, alas, the way the Empire operated.

A rotten civilization comes to terms with its disease, loves the virus that consumes it, loses its self-respect, lets a Saint Paul circulate. . . . In doing so, it declares itself beaten, ruined, finished. The odor of carrion draws and excites apostles, those greedy and loquacious grave-diggers.

A world of magnificence and light gave way before those aggressive "enemies of the Muses," those fanatics who, even today, fill us with a panic mixed with repugnance. The pagan world treated them with irony, a harmless weapon, too noble to reduce a horde insensitive to the finer points. The Boeotian who prays always gets the best of the cultivated man who thinks—who, stuck on his mountain-top of contempt and amusement, succumbs to the first assault. Dynamism, the privilege of the dregs, always comes from the bottom.

The horrors of the ancient world were preferable, a thousand times, to the horrors of Christianity. These fevered heads, these souls filled with ridiculous remorse, these wreckers of the gracious life dreamed by an over-refined society—they set about maltreating people's consciences in order to make "hearts" of them. The most competent set about with a wilfulness that at first repelled the intelligent, but later was destined to mark and disturb them, and make them a part of their unspeakable enterprise.

The Greco-Roman twilight deserved a better enemy, a better promise, a better religion. How can you believe even in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shadow of progress when you remember that those Christian fables, with no trouble at all, smothered Stoicism! If Stoicism had been able to grow and spread, to seize hold of the world, man would have *come through*, or almost. Resignation, made obligatory, would have taught us to endure our suffering with dignity, to silence our voices, to face our Nothingness coldly. Would poetry have vanished from our practices? Let poetry go! In exchange we would have developed the ability to endure our trials without fuss. To accuse no one, to stoop neither to sadness, nor joy, nor regret, to reduce our connection with the world to a harmonious play of defeat, to live condemned and serene, never imploring the deity but rather putting him on notice. . . . That was not possible. Stoicism, overrun from all sides and faithful to its principles, had the elegance to die without a struggle. A religion founds itself on the ruins of wisdom, but the tactics used by religion are scarcely appropriate to wisdom. Men will always prefer to despair on their knees rather than standing up. Salvation—it is man's cowardice and weariness that make him aspire to it; he is incapable of rising to inconsolability and finding in it a reason for pride. Anyone dishonors himself who dies escorted by the hopes that kept him alive. Let the crowd and the haranguers crawl toward "the ideal" and bog down in it! Solitude is not a gift, it is a mission: to rise to it, to take it upon oneself, is to renounce that portion of baseness needed to guarantee the success of any enterprise whatever, religious or otherwise. Look back over the history of ideas, actions and attitudes: you will see that the *future* has always been the accomplice of the rabble. No one preaches in the name of Marcus Aurelius: since he spoke only to himself, he had neither disciples nor followers. On the other hand, temples continue to be built where certain *Epistles* are still recited *ad nauseam*. So long as that is how it is, I will pursue, hammer and tongs, the one who so shrewdly involved us in his torment.

Luther

It's not enough to have faith; beyond that, you must suffer it, like a malediction. You must see in God an enemy, an executioner, a monster; you must project onto Him everything inhuman you are capable of, or dream of, and yet love Him in spite of that. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Church has made Him out dim-witted, degenerate, lovable. Luther protests: God, he maintains, is neither the "blockhead," nor the "meek in spirit," nor the "cuckold" we have been given to worship. He is a "devouring fire," madder, "more terrible than the devil"; he thrives on torturing us. Not that Luther's respect for Him is timid. Sometimes he tells Him off, talks to Him as an equal: "If God does not protect me and save my honor, the shame is His." Luther can get down on his knees and grovel; he knows how to be insolent, how to make a prayer sound like a provocation, how to begin with a sigh and end with a reprimand. He prays like a debater. For worship and cursing, any old term is good enough, even the most vulgar. By calling God to order, he gave a new meaning to humility, making it an exchange of miseries between the Creator and the creature. Enough of piety and unmanly anxiety! The least bit of aggression will restore faith: God pays no attention to tender supplications; He wants to be yelled at, pushed around; He loves those misunderstandings between Him and His which the Church racks its brains to smooth out. In watching over the *style* of its faithful, the Church cuts them off from Heaven; Heaven responds only to cursing, swearing, cries that come from the entrails—expressions that defy both theological censure and good taste, even . . . reason itself.

If you want to know what reason is good for, don't ask philosophers—it's their business to respect and defend it. If you want to get to the bottom of its secret, go to those who know it to their cost, know it in their bones. It is not by chance that Luther called it a whore. For that is what it is, in its nature and its habits. Does it not live by make-believe, inconstancy, and shamelessness? Since it does not attach to anything, since it *is* nothing, it gives itself to everybody, and anyone can claim it: the just and the unjust, martyr or tyrant. There is no cause it will not serve: it levels everything, without reservation, misgiving, or preference; the first come gets its favors. Only the naïve call it our greatest good. Luther unmasked it. It's true it is not given to everyone to be visited by the Devil.

There are those souls who throw themselves in the way of temptation, who live on an intimate footing with the Devil and only flee him the better to find him. . . . "I carry him hanging around my neck," Luther said. "He sleeps beside me in my bed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

oftener than my wife." In the end, he even asked "if the Devil might not be God."

Far from being a haven, Luther's faith was a deliberately provoked disaster, a peril that flattered and elevated him in his own eyes. If a religion were pure, it would be sterile: if anything in it is profound and virulent, it is not the divine but the demoniac. To try to rescue it from any connection with the Devil is to degrade it, make it anemic and sickly-sweet. To believe in the reality of salvation, you must first believe in the reality of the fall: every religious act begins with a perception of hell—the raw material of faith. Heaven comes along only *afterward* as a corrective and a consolation: a luxury, a superfetation, an accident required by our taste for equilibrium and symmetry. Only the Devil is *necessary*. The religion that dispenses with him sickens, wastes away, becomes a shapeless rationalized piety. He who seeks salvation at any cost will never make a great career in religion.

It is to the Reformation's credit that it troubled the sleep of conscience, denied it the narcotics of Rome, and in the place of the image of a benign God and a commonplace Satan it set up a dubious God and an all-powerful Devil. The idea of predestination, as Luther knew, is immoral. So, for him, all the more reason to support and promote it. His mission was to charge into others' minds and scandalize them, to aggravate their anguish, drive them back against a wall of impossible hope; in a word, *to cut down the number of the elect*. He was honest enough to admit he yielded on certain points to the suggestions of the Enemy . . . which explains his audacity in condemning the majority of believers. Did he mean to panic them? Without a doubt. It is the cynicism of prophets that reconciles us to their doctrines, and even to their victims.

Despite his incapacity for hope, he cut the figure of a liberator. More than one emancipation movement proceeds directly from him. His reason for proclaiming the absolute sovereignty of God was to cut down all other authority. "To be a prince without being a brigand is almost impossible," he said. His maxims on sedition are beautiful, those on heresy even more so. If Europe was formed by a series of schisms, if its glories come from a parade of heterodoxies, it is Luther's doing. He was the father of many an innovator but he had the advantage of them all in not going over to optimism, a vice that is the disgrace of revolutions. Being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nearer than we are to the sources of Sin, he could not help knowing that to liberate man is not necessarily to save him.

Tossed back and forth between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, torn between his convictions and his conflicts, this Rabelais of anguish was better suited than anybody to bolster Christianity as it was running down, dying out. He was the only one who knew how to make it gloomy. His piety was *black*. Even Pascal's, even Kierkegaard's, are pale beside his; the first was too much of a writer, the other too much of a philosopher. But Luther, with the strength of his peasant neurasthenia, had the right instincts for wrestling with the forces of both Good and Evil. Familiar and racy as he is, his vulgarity is never repulsive. There is nothing false about him, nothing of the typical apostle—neither their knowing hatred nor their studied violence. And a note of humor, something completely lacking in those boosters of the Cross, breaks through the unceremoniousness of his terror.

Luther? A Saint Paul, humanized.

The Pleasures of the Abyss

When a believer finds that he is intolerant of any solution, of any attempt to shut off the processes of knowledge, when he develops a distaste for conclusion, when he feels like this, all he can think of is to punish himself for having yielded to the blandishments of salvation. That is why he invents sin, or turns toward his own "dark night." The latter, too effective to have been merely invented, lays hold of his faith, unsettles it, and turns it into an eclipse of the Light.

I cannot resist reading religious thinkers, luxuriating in their terrors, feasting on them. I look on, in raptures, at Pascal's and am amazed to see how close he is to us. Senancour is Pascal gone diffuse, Chateaubriand is Pascal bombastic. There are few themes in modern psychology he did not touch on or foreshadow. But he did even more: by cramming religion with doubts and likening it to a deliberate stupor, he rehabilitated it in the eyes of disbelievers. Ambitious, fractious, and nosy in his own way, this gossip-columnist of heaven and hell was no doubt jealous of the saints, resentful because he was not their equal, because all he had to use against them was his torn faith. Lucky that it was torn—other-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wise he would have left us a few insipid *Little Flowers* or a soporific *Introduction to the Devout Life.*

Boredom, a condition that engrossed him somewhat more than grace, is what he thinks of endlessly. He makes it our substance, the "venom" of our minds, the principle that resides "in the bottom of our hearts." Is it possible he was only pretending, in order to feel it? Nothing could be more false. We can play at charity or piety, pray deliberately (which is what he did), fold our hands and strike an attitude to suit the occasion (which is what he recommended); but boredom—no exercise, no tradition, no method prepares us for it; no doctrine advocates it, no belief exonerates it. It is a feeling with a curse on it. Pascal responded to it because he had it inside him, and perhaps loved its "venom." He is obsessed by it, just as he is by "glory"—he speaks of the latter with so much insight we can hardly imagine he was using it simply as a pretext for denouncing our vanity. He described our need for it, analyzed it in all its details—suspect and revealing minutiae. An obsession with glory often hides the operations of boredom.

Ambiguous, like all moralists, and eager to rivet us to our torment and our wounds, he taught us to hate ourselves and to savor our spasms of self-loathing. If our consciences are running sores, if we are pest-ridden ecstatics, enthusiasts of our own rottenness, the responsibility rests with him.

He is spiritual and sensual at once: when he contemplates our insignificance we can feel him quiver with pleasure. He is drunk on our nothingness; he is stirred by anything that cancels us out. The gulf between the infinite and the infinitesimal throws him into exaltation; he participates like a connoisseur in the spectacle of our corruption. Was it not he who taught us the art of extracting from our miseries the substance of our joys?

The pleasures of self-hatred: the pleasures of the abyss! Let's stop pitying the man who discovered an abyss right beside him. No doubt he drew out of it many a delight . . . and—to save face —feigned terror. Even the greatest writers lie, when it comes to their own voluptuous pleasures: peering into the abyss is one of them. You need to be shameless in the modern way to own up to it without blushing; you need that naked curiosity we all feel about our own secrets. It may be that those soundings "of the heart" led to the discovery of the Unconscious, the latest version of Pascal's "abyss."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gogol

Certain witnesses—they are rare, it is true—make him out a saint; others, more frequently, a phantom. "There was so little of the living creature about him when he was alive," wrote Aksakoff the day after Gogol died, "that afraid as I am of corpses—I can't bear the sight of them—I didn't feel anything like that when I stood in front of his."

Gogol was tortured by cold. It never left him, and he never stopped repeating, "I am shivering . . . shivering." He rushed from country to country, consulted doctors, went from hospital to hospital. No climate can ever cure that inner cold. He is not known to have had any intimate relationships. His biographers speak openly of his impotence. There is no defect more isolating than that. The impotent man draws on an inner strength that makes him peculiar and lonely, inaccessible and, paradoxically, dangerous: he frightens people. He is an animal that has emerged from animality, a man of no breed, a life deserted by instinct; he is lifted up by what he has lost; he is the preferred victim of the spirit. Can you imagine an impotent rat? Rodents accomplish the act in question marvellously. No one can say as much for human beings. The more exceptional they are, the more likely they are to be deficient in that major way which wrenches them out of the chain of beings. They are permitted every activity except the one that connects them with the zoological family. Sexuality equalizes us, or better, it takes our mystery from us. . . . Much more than our other needs and enterprises, it puts us on an equal footing with our own kind. The more we practice it, the more we become like everybody else. It is in the accomplishment of a so-called bestial act that we prove we are citizens. Nothing is more public than the sexual act.

Abstinence, either forced or voluntary, places the individual both above and below the Species. He is, in fact, a melange of saint and idiot, who puzzles and astounds us. From that comes the equivocal distaste we feel for monks, or for any man who has renounced women, renounced his resemblance to us. We can never forgive him his solitude. It humiliates as much as it disgusts us; it arouses us. The strange superiority conferred by a defect! Gogol confessed one day that if he had given in to love, he would have been "reduced instantly to dust." Such a confession staggers and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fascinates us, makes us think of the "secret" of Kierkegaard and his "thorn in the flesh." However, the Danish philosopher was erotic by nature. The breaking off of his engagement, his failure in love, tormented him all his life and marked even his theological writings. Must one then compare Gogol to Swift, that other "blighted one"? That would be forgetting that Swift had, if not the chance to love, at least the chance to victimize. In order to situate Gogol, we have to imagine Swift without Stella, without Vanessa.

"The human beings we have before our eyes in *The Government Inspector* or in *Dead Souls,*" one biographer observes, "are 'nothing.' And being 'nothing,' they are 'everything.' "

In effect, they lack "substance," and from this comes their universality. What are Tchitchikov, Pliushkin, Sobakevitch, Nozdrev, Manilov, the hero of *The Overcoat,* or the hero of *The Nose,* if not ourselves reduced to our essence? Empty souls, says Gogol. For all that, they rise to a kind of grandeur: flat grandeur. He might be called the Shakespeare of the trivial, a Shakespeare chained to the observations of our little habits, our petty obsessions, the web of our lives. No one has gone farther than Gogol in his perception of daily life. Because of their reality his characters cease to exist, turn into symbols in which we recognize our whole selves. They do not decay; they are decayed and always have been. We can't help thinking of *The Possessed.* But while Dostoievsky's characters rush toward their limits, Gogol's fall back on theirs. The former seem to respond to a call that is beyond them; the latter only to their own incommensurate triviality.

Toward the end of his life, Gogol was overcome with remorse. His characters, he thought, were nothing but vice, vulgarity, filth. He wanted to give them some kind of virtue, snatch away their moral decay. So he wrote the second part of *Dead Souls.* Happily, he threw it in the fire; his heroes could not be "saved." This gesture, which has been laid to madness, came in reality out of his scruples as an artist. The writer got the better of the prophet. We like his ferocity, his contempt for men, his vision of a damned world. How could we have endured an edifying caricature? An irreparable loss, some say. A loss for the good, rather.

The late Gogol is still possessed by an obscure force he does not know how to use. He sinks into a lethargy broken only at long intervals by disjointed activity, the activity of a spectre. His humor,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which had kept his "fits of anguish" at a distance, disappears. A pitiful period in his life begins. His friends abandon him. He was foolish enough to publish his *Selected Correspondence* which, as he recognized, was "an affront to the public, an affront to his friends, an affront to himself." Slavophiles and Occidentalists alike repudiated him. His book was an apology for power, for slavery—a reactionary digression. In his misery he attached himself to a certain Father Matvei, a man impervious to art, narrow-minded, aggressive, who had over him the power of a confessor, a torturer. He carried the letters he received from Matvei around with him, reading and re-reading them: a remedy so stupid and idiotic it makes Pascal's *stupefy-yourself* seem like a mere caprice. When a writer's talent gives out, some conscience-keeper steps in to fill up the vacuum of inspiration with nonsense. Pushkin encouraged his genius; the other set about smothering what was left of it. . . . Preaching didn't satisfy Gogol; he wanted punishment too. His work gave universal meaning to farce, to the grimace; his religious torment suffered from it.

Some maintained that Gogol deserved his misery, that by it he was paying for his audacity in deforming the figure of man. The contrary seems to me true. He had to pay for being right. In matters of art, it is not our errors we pay for, but our "truth," whatever inklings of truth we have really seen. His characters pursued him; he carried the Klestakovs and the Tchitchikovs with him always, as he confessed, and their sub-humanity crushed him. He was never able to save one of them; as an artist, he could not. When he had lost the power to write, he tried to save his soul. The heroes he had created kept him from it. In spite of himself, he had to remain faithful to their nothingness.

In this case, it is not the Regent, Philippe d'Orléans, we are reminded of (who, according to Saint Simon, was "born bored"), nor Baudelaire nor the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, nor even the Devil and his unemployment in a world where there is no evil. We think rather of someone who turns his prayers against himself. At this point, boredom attains a kind of mystical dignity. "All absolute sensation is religious," Novalis said. In time, boredom replaced religious faith in Gogol, and became for him an absolute sensation, a religion.

[*Translated from the French by Marthiel Mathews*]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

Threesome

There was: Corporal Harold Q. for Quincy Henderson and
Private, First Class, Leroy J. for James, Costain. Each may properly stand
For any ordinary average American soldier but
There are many average ordinary American soldiers one cut
Above or below given norms. Averages need surveys to sell
And your survey tells every sort of lie about our moderate hell.
Theirs was not hell at all, at the first. It was sheer pure heaven,
Though anyone with a trace of brain who can throw 7-come-11
Might have learned from shooting craps that snow-jobs can't last forever,
While payment is fiercely exacted in kind when, then and wherever:
A railroad-crossing 6 kilometers from Hartsholz G.H.Q.
Had a little white-washed peasant-type wooden guard-house, green gates and two
Gables framed with shutters for one bed-room and a window-box
Full of blossoms plus one well-stacked babe built-in, to cook and wash their socks.
Convenient? My ass; what a set-up! She made rabbit-stew
Their first night, and wow: was she marvelous. It only goes to show you
After so much shit you've had it up to here,—well: man, it's then
God and/or luck, fate, circumstance, coincidence, chance,—who all you men
Implore in awful hours as solace or savior,—busts right in!
Costain and Henderson never tasted such sweets. Assuredly, sin
Sniffed its bit about; Henderson was Presbyterian born
And Costain, Roman Catholic but still stayed the dark relentless morn
Ten hours off. This girl, Mar-ee-ya, not Mar-eye, made beds
Or rather, one enormous one with fresh sheets for three hot sleepy heads.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It had been better had she a sister but even this way
Was quite the maddest night any of them ever played such mature play;
She was good and Harold no slouch while Leroy, generous man
Watching those two at games admired Harold's pocket-Herculean can:
That's what basket-ball does for you; then took his turn and slow, too.
Maria wasn't the virgin American crusaders deserve, that's true
But she had all her marbles. While watching Henderson make out
Costain mused: The prettiest sights on earth often you can't talk about.
He should have meant what he said; instead, told some intimate friends
What went on in that railway-hut. Ah, vanity certainly tends
To delete from grace, each of us. They were screwed chewed stewed tattooed
And never had it so good. Close friends whom they told never understood
That when rumor uncoils, in the long run, then close friends must pay.
While Costain and Henderson did full duty at their crossing by day,
Pleasuring by night, circumstances past control at G.H.Q.
Were forming a mean premonitory thundercloud which at first view
Was smaller than a man's hand which is what Costain often put
Under Maria's bust or fraternally on his buddy's tight butt.
Sharing is relief, man to man. But come: enough of all that
There are certain limits beyond which one must not trespass which is what
Lieutenant George T. for Tomlinson Kinicutt swore when told
Something Damn Queer went on in that R.R. hut. Our adult kids were sold
By vain boastings. No one pardons any one or thing in war
And George Tomlinson was Lieutenant Kinicutt to give what-for
To each and all who didn't learn his lore of how you'd better spell hell.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The rest of this fable is guessable, depressing; messy as well,—
A sordid comedy. At once he had them Up On Charges
Including: Sleeping-On-Guard, Raping-The-Enemy which enlarges
On horror, for, consulting our Judge Advocate's clever boy
He tacked on Malfeasance-Of-Funds, Suspicion-of-Sodomy. Destroy
Evil where manifest. He threw The Book at those hapless two
Who were now low as once happy high. Hard doom plus deep disgrace ensue.
Before Courts Martial he had words with Maria that same whore
Who might also be blamed, in twin interviews. First; absolutely swore
Nothing went on but mend their socks, make their bed but soon enough
She allowed as how she loved them; they sincerely loved her. This made it tough.
She shot the works for which Lieutenant was grateful. Her soft touch
Made him selflessly eager to set her up for himself although much
Of what made him hound these three trivial tramps for their puerile game
Were thoughts of Costain and Henderson cooling off and in the same
Bed which was what Henderson and Costain recalled when all shame and blame
Were wiped out,—after Stockade, Dishonorable Discharge, their
Forfeiting All Rights, Privileges, G.I. Bill,—hard burdens to bear.
They bore them, then. Now, sometimes, their kids may worry why their Dad
Often gets vague talking about wars which seem less exciting than sad.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

K. P.

A Tec. 3 pulls K.P. three times in ten days: is he sore.
He'd plans for this night. They are shot.
No one loves him, less than dirt, and what the fuck for
Is this war? Death were better: a lot.
Then some creepy jerk, he knows the type well, blows in where
He strips grease from the pots of his silly platoon:
Report To The Captain In Charge. Wipe your ass comb your hair
Get a shave, son, snap to it and soon.
What is this? God Damn Captain The Army and God;
What have *I* done? They've nothing on me now nor can
I've goofed and not known it; still it's odd
My luck stinks since this saga began.
He comes off K.P., gets shine shampoo and some sort of a shave,
Hunts his Captain in a weak storm of fury and gloom.
Kept fretting five minutes he worries himself almost brave,
Then he's called to a small inner room.
His Captain commences: My Boy, I have Bad News for You,
Be A Man, it happens to all of us some time or other;
Hands over the form writ in square type and true:
DAD IS DYING COME HOME LOVE MOTHER
With interest his Captain surveys him. How will he react,—
Quick break-up or stiff upper lip? So they stare and avert
Orbs which mirror the Soul. When a Fact is a Fact
It's no blink nor a sob, it's a blurt.
So: it's dying he is. I request, sir, compassionate-leave.
Granted. Catch a plane from the airstrip at nine.
Twin snappy salutes. I shan't grieve
Till I'm given a sign.
Grief lurks in its lair to unleash in appropriate season.
Adjustment takes time. As for Father,—who he?
(This character, dead or still dying). With reason
He asks himself: What's he to me?
He returns to his mess-hall. Lamps low, they're all nearly through.
His secret stays shut though indeed, some notice a change;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet no one dares risk: What the hell's eating you?
Clenched fast, he buffs his gas-range.
Daddy: Where have you been all my life; now from where
Hidest Thou Thy hard face from thy prodigal son?
Before you take off in the wan thankless air
Bid me know what I've done.
Guilt boils from his loins up the vascular spine of his youth
Simmering liver and lights to their slim broth of shame.
Sincerely,—I do not give one damn. It's the truth.
Am I wholly to blame?
I'm a heel I'm abnormal I'm happy the bastard is dead;
Now Mom, Bud and I have a chance to exist in some peace.
He surrenders to moderate sobs while his head
Fills with mucus, damp tears and release.
This gets me nowhere. Blow my nose. Wipe my eyes.
I'm no kid. I'm a man. What is more: I am free.
Choirs swelling an end to film-epics, arise:
Dad: we thank thee.

Hijack

We drive all day from mildly picturesque Coumbes-sur-Seine
Through impressionist landscape it's nice to be seeing again;
My Colonel, no companion of choice, uncorks his private pint
of pain.

I've driven for this old pre-World War I crock before.
He doesn't like me for stink. I deem him a snobby old bore
But we're inextricably connected by tensions ingrained in this
war.

His grief derives from a grandson he's crazy about
Whom he's learned was captured two days ago in a censored
rout
Of U.S. troops. Now we ride up front fast trying to find some-
thing out.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

North, ever North; then Northeast. Disturbing tableaux
abound;
Relics of men and machinery, busted husks tossed around;
As we roll through sinister buzzings, nervous-making mysterious
sound

Upsets us, and bang: we stall in a small market-square,
But how best to describe it? A pitched battle takes place right
there
While the parties engaged wear one uniform: ours. Interpret
this scare

As some insane gag, but now a big gasoline-truck
Overturns. Jerry-cans bounce on fierce combatants striking or
struck
By fist, gun-butt, monkey-wrench. If we have only average luck

Things won't pop, someone get hurt: us. I watch Colonel stand
In our dead jeep shouting orders though none obey his com-
mand
Sensible as it sounds: Stop, boys; stop right Now; and then his
good right hand

Reaches for sidearms. I yank him down, jerk our jeep back.
Bodies swivel around the vehicle and dusk dyes to deep black
While it all gets more unreal although staying real enough.
Absolute lack

Of discipline or authority. Colonel slumps down
Sulking through this crazy vague riot in a French border-town
Where American soldiers sock one another for some obscure
renown.

Hence: construe this authentic hilarious scene,
Melodramatic yet stereoscopic. What has just been
Logical chaos stems from hysteria mainly about gasoline.

Our motorized units forged so wildly far ahead

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Many imagined they'd seized victory but were then stopped dead.
Whichever eager beaver planned this mad push should have stood in bed.

Hence we hijack gas from whom gas has to hijack;
There's nowhere near enough to make up our present serious lack,
Not alone to sustain an advance but to stop being shoved way back.

Colonel and I, in sort of a bad spot, are safe enough.
I still have, thank Christ, my own tank half-full of the sacred stuff
Which brings us back to base though driving black-out routes by night is rough.

My pre-World War I officer sweats in the dirt
Clinging to a great American army losing its lousy shirt,—
His adored grandson captured by the enemy; lost; maybe hurt. . . .

Black Joe

This Norman coastal meadow lies in a chill grey haze of light;
A soldier first sees France by day; he'd hit the beach by night.
Stepping over snoring men, he tries to find him fire;
Uncle Tom cooks for Uncle Sam as once he had for hire.
Our soldier thanks the happy black, returns to his own group
And from those borrowed embers brought, a sharp new flame flares up.
One by one his drowsy gang uncoils from each stern bed,
Stiffens to stretch, scratch, realize not one of them is dead.
Around our fire, like bugs to light, amble a few dazed oxen-stray
Negro troops who've slogged all night, orchard from beach-head, miles away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We whites with gummy eye, but brave as our blond blood stirs
to its round
Stare hard the dark intruders down to stand our own usurped
ground.
With psyches sound, but half awake, we keep possession of our
pyre
Warding the sombre soldiers off; this shall remain a white-
man's fire.
Thus hard arrayed, fright against fright, upon the first dawn
of our fights
In common against a common foe, smoulder their wrongs
against our rights.

Vaudeville

Pete Petersen, before this bit, a professional entertainer;
He and a partner tossed two girls on the Two-a-Day,
Swung them by their heels and snatched them in mid-air,
Billed as "Pete's Meteors: Acrobatic Adagio & Classical Ballet."
His vulnerable grin, efficiency or bland physique
Landed him in Graves' Registration, a slot few strive to seek.
He follows death around picking up pieces,
Recovering men and portions of men so that by dawn
Only the landscape bares its wounds, the dead are gone.
Near Echternach after the last stand they had the heart to make
With much personal slaughter by small-arms at close range
I drove for an officer sent down to look things over.
There was Pete slouched on a stump catching his wind.
On your feet: salute: yes Sir?
Bad here what? Yes Sir.
Good manners or knowing no word could ever condone
What happened, what he'd had to do, had done
Spared further grief. Pete sat down.
A shimmering pulsation of exhaustion fixed him
In its throbbing aura like footlights when the curtain rises.
His act is over. Nothing now till the next show.
He takes his break while stage-hands move the scenery
And the Performing Dogs are led up from below.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

J. MITCHELL MORSE

The Contemplative Life According to Samuel Beckett

THE NUMBER OF CONTEMPLATIVES is always small, for of all strenuous lives the contemplative life is most strenuous. The strain and the joy of climbing Mount Everest, though doubtless extreme in their kind, are little enough by comparison with the strain and the joy of achieving some vision, in however dark a glass, of that universal order in which all opposites, contrarieties and contradictions are reconciled, that subtle harmony we call truth or love or God. The achievement is especially difficult for those who, like Samuel Beckett, are atheists and antitheists: for Beckett has reconciled the atheist and antitheist positions by making God a figment of the misanthropic and masochistic side of our nature, in whose service is perfect misery. This, I think, may be a key to the meaning of Beckett's works; it is given to us, or seems to be given to us, in *The Unnamable* and its second part, *Comment c'est*; for in all the previous novels God seems to be a malevolent imbecile, but in these two he speaks directly at last, and we learn that his words are *logoi spermatikoi*: with him, to utter is to create, and to be is to utter. He has no wish to utter anything, he says, no wish to manifest himself in any way, no wish to be; he longs for silence and nonentity; he is sick of creation; he would gladly end the whole sorry game if only "they" would let him; and we gradually realize that by "they" he means us.

All Beckett's other central characters wreck their lives pursuing the Unnamable. Their pursuit is vain, because they do not recognize five cardinal facts about him: (1) that they have created him in their own image; (2) that he therefore is also seeking the Unnamable, whom he calls his master; (3) that they are his master, since by being himself, such as he is, he does their will, such as it is; (4) that whatever mutual need there may be, the notion that man can find peace in God is on a par with the notion that God can find peace in man; and (5) that since individually and collectively men have a very imperfect understanding of God,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he has a very imperfect understanding of himself. He conforms willy-nilly to their conceptions of him, caricatures though he knows them to be; like theirs, his own conception of himself is continuously evolving; his story is never finished, his being never complete or determined, though he includes all things and is all things. Certainly the Unnamable is Satan as well as God: he refers to Christ as "the other," which is Satan's traditional way of avoiding the name; he calls himself a "protégé" of the master, which Satan certainly is; he is a prisoner, he is damned, he is full of ill will toward the human race and toward himself, and from his eyes forever flow tears such as martyrs weep. All this we learn fairly early in his egocentric monologue, which seems to ramble but turns out to be beautifully organized; at the same time, however, he tells us frankly that everything he says is a lie—as we might expect; that even if he could fall asleep the lies would go on dribbling from his mouth; and it follows logically that this statement also is a lie. So that we know nothing about him except that, being unfinished, being involved in endless flux, being himself the flux, he is obviously unhappy. The depth of his unhappiness, his dissatisfaction with himself, is indicated by the fact that in *Comment c'est* he divides himself into three persons and tries triads of names on himself; and the three persons, following the best of models, differ only as three torches burning with one fire. The schizophrenic's misery lies in the fact that, though split, he remains *one*. Beckett's God is lonely.

Thus, though similar in many ways, he differs essentially from the God of the Neo-Platonists and the more sophisticated Jewish and Christian mystics. Their God, like Einstein's, is subtle but not malicious. He is perfect and serene; his happiness is himself; and since his creatures are partial manifestations of himself, all is well with them whether they realize it or not; everything is for their good, even though, since it is a limited good apportioned to their limited natures, it may seem evil. Thus Job on his dunghill praised God; thus the Hassidim in their ghettos, ragged, hungry and subject to pogroms, danced for joy; thus the whole line of Christian mystics, from Saint Paul onward, have found that the way to their deepest satisfaction lay through the acceptance of suffering, physical and mental, voluntary or involuntary, their own or others'. The next best thing to being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poor, like Antoinette Bourignon, is visiting the poor, like Evelyn Underhill. It is this point of view that Beckett opposes: starting with the undeniable fact of human suffering, he concludes that not all is right with the world and asks what kind of God could have created it or even permitted it.

To this old question he offers two different answers: in the plays God is if not all-powerful at least all-stupid, which for purposes of domination is perhaps even better, and infinitely malicious—nothing is too low or mean for him to do, no practical joke is too banal; but in the novels God becomes man repeatedly, incarnating himself in a series of weary neurotics whom he delights in frustrating, tormenting, mutilating and driving mad. Only when he speaks in his own proper Neo-Platonic person—an absurd contradiction for which he says he is not responsible—do we realize that his creatures have created him—or are creating him—and that he is merely carrying out the assignment they have given him—or are in process of giving him.

The novels are therefore more interesting than the plays. And since *The Unnamable* and *Comment c'est* afford a clue to them all, I think we must take them as an unobtrusively unified series of six, not as three independent novels and a trilogy. *Molloy, Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* are not a trilogy as the term is generally understood; they have no common characters whose careers we can follow; they have as little ostensible connection with each other as with *Murphy* and *Watt*—and as much with these as with each other. There are, after all, references to the characters Murphy and Molloy in *Malone Dies* and to the characters Murphy and Watt in *The Unnamable*. The fact that the novels of the so-called trilogy are all monologues does not give them any formal unity; the publisher's blurb notwithstanding, they are not "the narrative of a man without a name who is searching for his self"; Molloy, Moran, Malone, MacMann, Lemuel, Sapo, Saposcat, Murphy, Neary, Watt, Knott, Lambert, Hackett, Pim, Bom, Krem, etc., and such figures in the background as Youdi, Mahood, Basil, Mercier, Quin, Ash and perhaps even Bando—are indeed all one, but only as in *Finnegans Wake* Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington are one and Joan of Arc and Toussaint L'Ouverture are one. We have to do here with a unity that is not formal but metaphysical, a matter not of related plots but of recurrent symbols.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For notwithstanding the whimsical and ambiguous disclaimer at the end of *Watt,* "No symbols where none intended," Beckett's novels are forests of symbols, artfully planted, tended and intended; their correspondences are quite plain. Several characters, for example, have the cold eyes of gulls; hens pace, parrots and parakeets flit through the books, and Malone is informed of his impending death by "a little bird . . . , the paraclete perhaps, psittaceously named" (p. 77).[1] Malone's fictional creation MacMann, whose name means "son of man," is "by temperament more reptile than bird" (p. 70)—as we might expect, since he is in many other ways a devil as well as a holy ghost—though at the same time and on the other hand he is "no more than human, than the son and grandson and great-grandson of humans" (p. 68). Molloy toward the end of his wanderings crawls on his belly, as he says, "like a reptile," and turns out also to have a reptilian heart: "For it does not beat, not my heart, I'd have to refer you to hydraulics for the squelch that old pump makes" (p. 121). Reptiles come in various colors, but the cliché color for them is green. The red devil is a Renaissance invention; in the middle ages, when knowledge of the afterlife was more accurate, the devil was quite properly green. All Beckett's protagonists, being moreover Irishmen, wear green or greenish clothes of great age, long, tubular and stiff, caked and impregnated to impermeability with dirt—so that when Moran's clothes begin to disintegrate we know beyond question that he is near death. This is good Christian orthodoxy. The protagonists all walk or crawl with difficulty, being pilgrims in this world; they all play games of permutation, vainly seeking that perfect distribution in which alone True Justice consists; they all prefer the contemplative to the active life; they are all scorned by the active world, and altogether they have so many habits, attitudes and afflictions in common that I suspect that we have to do with a series of metempsychoses or eternal returns.

Beckett having been when young a disciple of Joyce, this is not surprising. Now, a disciple no longer but a practicing genius in his own right, he practices with great brilliance and originality an art he learned from the old master: the art of raising the dead. "Bloom is not *like* Ulysses, he *is* Ulysses," said the old master.

[1] All page numbers refer to the Grove Press paperback editions except in the case of *Comment c'est,* which is published by Editions de Minuit. The translation from it is my own.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This statement can be documented: for Plato, not Victor Bérard as the sly Joyce gravely suggested, seems to have given the basic hint for *Ulysses*. At the end of *The Republic* (620 C) we find Leopold Bloom in the very process of that metempsychosis with which he is concerned throughout his Odyssey:

> By chance it fell to the soul of Odysseus to choose his lot last of all, and he went to make his choice. Because of the memory of his former sufferings he had renounced ambition, and he looked around a long time for the life of an ordinary man of no position; at last, with some difficulty, he found it lying pushed aside and disregarded by the others, and when he saw it he took it gladly, and said he would have done the same if he had had the first choice.

But Bloom's life, though less violent than that of Odysseus, is at least as eventful and full of suffering; for peace has its defeats, in modern literature at least, no less renowned than war's. Plato emphasizes that since each man chooses his nature he is responsible for the destiny that flows from it: he cannot blame the gods (617 E). Of course the question arises, Why does he make one choice rather than another?—and Plato's answer blurs and all but ignores the implication that a man chooses according to the nature he already has, which—however much he has modified it through repeated incarnations—must in the first instance have been given by the gods. The trouble is that we don't know what the first instance was. Thus on the one hand, since it is Odysseus who makes the choice, his soul is only misrepresented by Bloom's career; but on the other hand, since it is Bloom whom he chooses to be, he is not misrepresenting himself—or at least no more than the soul of Bloom was misrepresented by the career of Odysseus, assuming him to have made that choice on the earlier go-round. Both possibilities are present in that soul, and doubtless others as well; the resulting sense of hidden possibilities, of latency, of untouched and unknown resources, is largely responsible for the fascination that Bloom works on the reader, for it is the source of all magic, healing, and grace. Not for nothing did the Greeks assign poetry and medicine to the same god.

> "I cannot think what women see in Murphy . . . Can you?" said Neary.
>
> Wylie considered for a moment. Then he said:
>
> "It's his—" stopping for want of the right word. There seemed to be, for once, a right word.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"His what?" said Neary.

. . .

"His surgical quality," said Wylie.
It was not quite the right word.[2]

"The Surgeon" is one of the traditional epithets of Christ. The right word, however, as Beckett later makes clear, is "magical." Murphy denies the prostitute Celia's existentialist statement, "I am what I do," and though she doesn't accept or even understand his denial, she is attracted to him because he is more than he does and because he makes her feel, however vaguely, that she is more than she does. Thus, as long as he is with her, he saves and redeems her in her own subconscious apprehension of herself, in her deepest essence. Her career becomes, for the time being, the merest accident. As a practicing solipsist, he has no desire to save her from it; he even regrets, as an inconvenience, the desire he arouses in her to save herself; he explicitly rejects her notion that he should become a new man and she a new woman; he would be quite willing to let her support him and to put up with whatever low esteem and lack of privacy that might involve, living as he does in the cunningly made little world of his own mind and not valuing what he calls "the big world." We regard him with pain, annoyance, impatience and disgust, but not without sympathy or even respect, since he does in practice value his inner life and has the courage of his withdrawal. His courage exceeds that of the mystics of faith, who are represented in modern London by Mr. Kelly with his kite or soul. Mr. Kelly consoles himself with Pascal's wager: *"Celia, s'il y a, Celia, s'il y a"* (p. 115). Murphy does not. As far as he is concerned, the world he rejects is the only world outside himself. If we read Celia as Heaven—and I'm afraid we must—then Murphy finds its inducements meretricious.

Celia's mistake lies in her belief that she can make this contemplative "a man of the world." His redeeming force—a force which only a few, the lunatic and the inviolably innocent, can feel—he exerts unintentionally and unconsciously, by the mere

[2] *Murphy*, p. 62. See also pp. 32, 39, 80, 157, 183, and 202; and compare this description of Bloom's hand in *Ulysses*, Modern Library edition, p. 658:

"Why did absence of light disturb him less than presence of noise?

"Because of the surety of the sense of touch in his firm full masculine feminine passive active hand.

"What quality did it (his hand) possess . . . ?

"The operative surgical quality. . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fact of being himself; he makes no claim to messiahship; and that is perhaps an essential condition for any redeemer of others, at least in our time. For in an age when mass appeals are common and continuous, when apostolic techniques are used to sell toothpaste and inertia, they no longer touch our minds or our serious feelings; we can be saved only privately and only as individuals, one here, one there—and by other methods. Since only retail redemption is now possible, and since messianism is traditionally a wholesale operation, no modern claim to messiahship will stand. Moreover, if a man who claims to be the messiah is accepted, we know thereby that his claim is invalid, since all the prophets who have spoken on the subject agree that the messiah will be rejected; so that those who accept him and urge others to accept him take a grave responsibility: if they convince enough people, they disprove his claim. But even if he is rejected it proves nothing, since many false messiahs also are rejected. This alone would make mass redemption impossible.

Our secular age, in any case, does not seek spiritual redemption: our mass movements are political and social, not religious, though some of them use traditional religious arguments. And whether an individual seeking redemption goes to a priest or minister or to a psychologist makes little difference in terms of religion, since the most popular religious counselors now deal in the consolations of Sunday-supplement psychology, not of mysticism or theology. Only in the wild mountains, the boring prairies and the dim swamps do the beasts of Revelation still frighten and redeem us. Generally speaking. Nevertheless the notion of individual spiritual rebirth persists, if only in readers of books; and the notion that it can be achieved through the help of another person persists, if only as a convention of literature. "All roads lead to Murphy," says Neary, leading the pilgrims.

Murphy's death saves Cooper, who for the first time overcomes his neurotic inability either to sit or to remove his hat. Neither alive nor dead does Murphy save Celia in any practical way, but he does enable her to face herself—a difficult achievement that represents, if not salvation, at least growth. During the first stage of their relationship she cannot bring herself to say the word "horoscope," which in her pronunciation would be "whoroscope"—the title of one of Beckett's early works (pp. 8, 9, 23, 31).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Later, however, she is able to say, "I am what I do," if only by way of begging Murphy to save her in terms of this world; after he leaves her she becomes more and more like him and achieves something of his freedom from accepted values, so that toward the end, when the pilgrims look her up, she can introduce herself with the statement, "I am a prostitute." Also as a result of her relationship with Murphy she experiences for the first time love and grief; thus she is saved if there is salvation in the awakening of our gentler impulses—a question I leave open. Neary mourns Murphy as a friend; he will save himself later. The other pilgrims, Wylie and Miss Counihan, being creatures of the big world entirely, are beyond saving.

But if others seek Murphy, he also seeks himself. All life, he says, is "a wandering to find home." This Neo-Platonic God finds home at last in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, an insane asylum that resembles a church in its design and administration, the layout of the wards being "that of naves and transepts," the cells being called "mansions" as in John 14:2, the attendants being referred to as "ministers of mercy," and the authority of the head male nurse being that of "a resolute and successful pope." Molloy also winds up in an insane asylum, and so does Malone. Watt at the end of his book is once more wandering madly, but he has spent several years as a servant in a mansion whose owner is as serene and unknowable as God, though the difficulty of meeting his simple daily needs plays the devil with the surrounding population. Watt also seems to be God. So do Molloy, Moran, Malone, and several of Malone's fictional characters. Consider the following passages, one for each character, chosen for their brevity from among many others:

Murphy's mind considered itself independent of external nature, since "Nothing had ever been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it." (*Murphy*, p. 107.)

Watt entered the home of Mr. Knott apparently unbidden, waited in the dark kitchen by the dying fire, and after a time was greeted by the servant whose term of service was over: "Haw! how it all comes back to me, to be sure. That look! That weary watchful vacancy! The man arrives! The dark ways all behind, all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

within, the long dark ways, in his head, in his side, in his hands and feet, and he sits in the red gloom, picking his nose, waiting for the dawn to break. The dawn! The sun! The light! Haw! The long blue days, for his head, for his side, and the little paths for his feet, and all the brightness to touch and gather." (*Watt,* p. 39.)

Watt seldom saw Mr. Knott, and never face to face as he wished and feared to do. "Add to this that the few glimpses caught of Mr. Knott, by Watt, were not clearly caught, but as it were in a glass, not a looking-glass, a plain glass, an eastern window at morning, a western window at evening." (*Watt,* pp. 146-7.)

Molloy's knowledge of events was very much like that of the God of the Neo-Platonists: "I was not given to presentiments, but to sentiments sweet and simple, to episentiments rather, if I may venture to say so. I will even go further (what can I lose?), I knew only in advance, for when the time came I knew no longer, you may have noticed it, or only when I made a superhuman effort, and when the time was past I no longer knew either, I regained my ignorance." (*Molloy,* pp. 110-111.)

Moran could not be sure how he had come to know of Molloy: "Molloy, or Mollose, was no stranger to me. If I had had colleagues, I might have suspected I had spoken of him to them, as of one destined to occupy us, sooner or later. But I had no colleagues and knew nothing of the circumstances in which I had learnt of his existence. Perhaps I had invented him, I mean found him ready made in my head. . . . For who could have spoken to me of Molloy if not myself and to whom if not myself could I have spoken of him?" (*Molloy,* pp. 152-3.)

The dying Malone consoles himself: "This may well be my last journey, down the long familiar galleries, with my little suns and moons that I hang aloft and my pockets full of pebbles to stand for men and their seasons, my last, if I'm lucky. Then back here, to me, whatever that means, and no more leaving me, no more asking me for what I haven't got." (*Malone Dies,* p. 63.)

Like The Unnamable, Malone seems to have created all the characters in the other books—but that is a claim that might be made for each of them also: to have been the creator of the others. However that may be, in the book devoted to him Malone does write stories and create characters who are images of tendencies in his own nature. Perhaps the most attractive of these is the boy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sapo, whose names mean "soap" and who seems to be, if not a God come to earth, at least a saint in the tradition of the Fools of God. His parents think of him, as Wylie of Murphy, as a surgeon—though they doubt that he would be able to pass the examinations:

> Sapo's phlegm, his silent ways, were not of a nature to please. In the midst of tumult, at school and at home, he remained motionless in his place, often standing, and gazed straight before him with eyes pale and unwavering as a gull's. People wondered what he could brood on thus, hour after hour. His father supposed him a prey to the first flutterings of sex. At sixteen I was the same, he would say. At sixteen you were earning your living, said his wife. So I was, said Mr. Saposcat. But in the view of his teachers the signs were those of besottedness pure and simple. Sapo dropped his jaw and breathed through his mouth. It is not easy to see in virtue of what this expression is incompatible with erotic thoughts. But indeed his dream was less of girls than of himself, his own life, his life to be. That is more than enough to stop up the nose of a lucid and sensitive boy, and cause his jaw temporarily to sag. (*Malone Dies,* pp. 15-16.)

The narrator of *Comment c'est* divides the book of his life into three groups of fragmentary statements: Before Pim, With Pim, and After Pim. Pim seems to be the Word, the Manifestation, in whose nature the Incarnation and all its torments were implicit from the beginning. He seems to have resurrected at least one soul, for he once had a bride with the charming name of Pam Prim—an English girl if ever there was one, perhaps even the Church of England, though I blush to think it; in any case, make of her what you will, he threw her out the window and sat inconsolable beside her dying bed. Now all is over for him; nevertheless all continues, and is all yet to do. He crawls on his belly through the mud of this world, hearing his voice within and a voice from without in fragments of a never-ending poem whose themes are endlessly repeated:

> that it was necessarily the other the old one of whom it [the voice] told me that first I had submitted to him then left him to go toward Pim as Pim to me submitted then left to go toward his other to him to no without knowing it all here without knowing it our justice to go away never to leave to go never to go toward
>
> millions millions we are millions and we are three I speak from my point of view Bem is Bom Bom Bem let's say Bom it's better Bom then I and Pim I in the middle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thus in me I quote always when that one stops gasping fragments of that old voice about it its slips its exactitudes about us the millions that we are the three our pairings travels and renunciations about me all alone I quote always my imaginary travels imaginary brothers in me when that one stops gasping who was outside quaqua from everywhere fragments I murmur them

a voice that if I had one I could believe my own that just when I hear it I quote always they hear it too both the one whom Bom has left to come toward me and the one to go toward whom Pim has left me and if we are a million the 499,997 others forsaken

the same voice the same things with proper names almost and still two are enough everyone is waiting nameless his Bom goes nameless toward his Pim (pp. 138ff.)

And so on. Whether or not we hear Christian Morgenstern's "Bim, Bam, Bom," all Beckett's protagonists suffer from what John Barth calls "cosmopsis": the disease of seeing everything whole, under the aspect of eternity and in all its relations, so that emphasis, choice and value become impossible. It is a disease that unfits us for mortality: for our short life and limited vision amid the opacities of the finite world. It is a condition that tempts every man of any sensibility, but we yield to it only in that state beyond or above or beneath reason where the utmost courage and the utmost cowardice are one. For to be open to all influences, to be completely conscious, is to be paralyzed; but paralysis in the earthly city is not necessarily bad for those who, like Beckett's characters, are citizens of their own skulls. The limited consciousness we need for practical life moves chiefly in the little paths of its limitation, the paths of habit. William James in his section on habit observes that we tie our shoes and button our buttons without thought, that if we did not do a great many such things without thought life would be impossibly complicated, and that the more things we do unconsciously the more efficient we can be. We are even more efficiently perfunctory in our inner life. But mystics and artists are interested in extending and intensifying their consciousness, not in being efficient. Watt, like the hero of *L'expulsé,* is so conscious of every motion involved in walking that his walk is grotesque and he travels very slowly; and his speech during his stay with Mr. Knott, though absolutely logical and coherent, is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not much more perspicuous than Mr. Knott's own wordless unintelligibility.

In his study of Proust Beckett deals with this theme in a manner more plainly expository than the difficult requirements of symbolist fiction permit. The study is literary criticism of the only kind worth reading, a conversation between two intelligent men in which the work under discussion serves only as a source of illustrations, their chief concern being not the work itself but the human soul, which it illuminates. The theme of *Remembrance of Things Past,* says Beckett, is the constant change that proceeds in "the only world that has value and significance, the world of our own latent consciousness" (p. 3). Since that seems to be the theme of Beckett's own work, it will be helpful for us to read an explicit statement of his view of the conflict between habit and consciousness, between the outer light that guides our feet in the safe paths of this world and the inner light that blinds us to the value of the things this world values. This again is from *Proust:*

> Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. . . . Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual's consciousness, . . . the pact must be continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date. The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects. The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations . . . represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being. . . . The suffering of being: that is, the free play of every faculty. Because the pernicious devotion of habit paralyses our attention, drugs those handmaidens of perception whose co-operation is not absolutely essential. . . . [But] the mystery of a strange sky or a strange room [may be too much for habit to deal with]. Then the atrophied faculties come to the rescue, and the maximum value of our being is restored. (pp. 7-9.)

What Murphy wants above all else is to be "alive in his mind." What the other protagonists suffer from is the intensity of life

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with which they live in their own minds, the terrible all-inclusiveness of their apprehension, the agony of cosmopsis. The art with which a writer tries to realize their state must involve a search as agonizing as their own. The processes of such art Beckett has himself indicated in a note for an exhibition of paintings by Bram Van Velde: "An endless unveiling, veil behind veil, layer on layer of imperfect transparences, an unveiling toward the never-to-be-unveiled, the last nothing, the first thing." This is no doubt what he called in *Proust* "the ideal core of the onion." Every contemplative pursues that ideal and loses the onion; and an artist who undertakes to convey to us of the more or less active life the ardors of the contemplative search must stand with at least one foot in each world. But what of the humble critic or academic expositor? Speaking only for myself, I can say only that my gross appetite apprehends the gross onion in the grossest terms. I contemplate steaks and salads. I keep my feet on the ground—though without pride, suspecting that it is a much overrated accomplishment.[3]

[3] Since this article was written three books on Beckett have appeared: *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*, by Hugh Kenner (Grove Press, paperback, $1.95); *Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self*, by Frederick J. Hoffman (Southern Illinois University Press, $4.50), and *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, by Ruby Cohn (Rutgers University Press, $6). As I write this note, Melvin Friedman is editing a Beckett issue of *Les Lettres Modernes*. Mr. Hoffman's book is everything we have come to expect of him: reading the texts with intelligence that matches his learning, he has illuminated them for us all. He is especially good on Beckett's style. He is not concerned with biography. Mrs. Cohn is not concerned with biography either; she does give us a good bibliography, though not a complete one: on the difficulties of Beckett bibliography, see Henry W. Wenning's catalog of his collection. The collection has been sold, but the list is worth having. (282 York Street, New Haven, Conn.) In an appendix, Mrs. Cohn gives us the texts of "Whoroscope," "Ooftish" and a short early piece from *The New Review*, and a translation of Watt's anti-language. Her readings are enlightening, her identifications and cross-references are helpful, and she writes with style. Mr. Kenner also writes with style, as always, and offers some useful information of the biographical kind, including a chronology. In his discussion of the texts, however, he has depended too much on interviews with Beckett and too little on his own judgment, which is excellent when he lets it operate. Sometimes Beckett seems to have pulled his leg. Kenner asked Beckett why he started writing in French, and solemnly reports a silly answer, apparently unaware that Beckett has given at least three other silly answers to other interviewers—which Mrs. Cohn records. Kenner tells us that Beckett told him that Godot was suggested by a Paris bicycle racer named Godeau; if that seems incredible, he says, remember that it came from Beckett himself. Mrs. Cohn suggests a more plausible source, Balzac's M. Godeau, who never comes; I nominate Marcel Jouhandeau's godlike character of the same name; and we must face the possibility that Simone Weil's *Attente de Dieu* influenced the conception of *En Attendant Godot*, if not the title. We need a biographical study. We don't know, for example, whether Beckett's origins are Protestant, as Martin Esslin and Mrs. Cohn say, or Jewish, as Grattan Freyer says, or both, as is possible. After all, Leopold Bloom was a Protestant before he became a Catholic, and if Beckett isn't a Jew he should be.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JEAN GARRIGUE

'Thy Love Is One Thou'st Not Yet Known'

Let us be quiet today. The earth is still,
The sun is drowsy, sleeping in the clouds
Like sleepless birds of day who take to rest
Or take at least to silence in their nests,
Only some very few adventured out
To stride the levels of the rusty grass.

But for the crickets in a singsong shrill
Of notes too small to be called notes,
Some tick and jilt of quaver in the low tangle,
Soprano as some fifing of an elf,
Or other hopping creatures made of green,
Green-whiskered, green-antennaed, green-armored,
There is no other cry or breath. Air is still,
As every flower tells and every leaf,
And waters where they were subside to wells
Or sink their resourceful chatter underground.

As if the quick of all that stir and bloom
By brook and wind pulsation, ceaseless play
Of clouds, leaves, action of the plants
That in their beds stand taller every day,
Had taken a quietus or, quiescent,
Retired into some first most voiceless place,
Begot by silence on a stillness,
An in-going into the unlustred zone
Of some more subtle hermit energy
So close, unfathomed, in a trance
It gets the dwelling places of the sense
Their tendrils down in a white hush;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Till it instructs some other one
Far finer than our five working,
Strenuous in a quick union,
Of a subtility whereby a baring's come,
Some skin upon appearance torn
Down for an instant to a one so fine
It is of apparition's very surged
And irreducible shade.

Nor is this feint and shadow-work of dream
But rather's known as by the fineness of a light
And drowsy fineness of an air containing
What is too fine but to be invisible,
Too airy to be heard or seen except
By violent wide-awakeness on a cloud:
Only by the loosening of such bonds
As bares the day to garments of the flower,
To leaning lilies much too tall
To support their flaring crowns,
Veronica, vervain, bent over by the rain,
And Queen Anne's lace upon its gawky stem.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DAVID WAGONER

A Guide to Dungeness Spit

Out of wild roses down from the switching road between pools
We step to an arm of land washed from the sea.
On the windward shore
The combers come from the strait, from narrows and shoals
Far below sight. To leeward, floating on trees
In a blue cove, the cormorants
Stretch to a point above us, their wings held out like skysails.
Where shall we walk? First, put your prints to the sea,
Fill them, and pause there:
Seven miles to the lighthouse, curved yellow-and-grey miles
Tossed among kelp, abandoned with bleaching rooftrees,
Past reaches and currents;
And we must go afoot at a time when the tide is heeling.
Those whistling overhead are Canada geese;
Some on the waves are loons,
And more on the sand are pipers. There, Bonaparte's gulls
Settle a single perch. Those are sponges.
Those are the ends of bones.
If we cross to the inner shore, the grebes and goldeneyes
Rear themselves and plunge through the still surface,
Fishing below the dunes
And rising alarmed, higher than waves. Those are cockleshells.
And these are the dead. I said we would come to these.
Stoop to the stones.
Overturn one: the grey-and-white, inch-long crabs come pulsing
And clambering from their hollows, tiptoeing sideways.
They lift their pincers
To defend the dark. Let us step this way. Follow me closely
Past snowy plovers bustling among sand-fleas.
The air grows dense.
You must decide now whether we shall walk for miles and miles
And whether all birds are the young of other creatures
Or their own young ones,
Or simply their old selves because they die. One falls,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And the others touch him webfoot or with claws,
Treading him for the ocean.
This is called sanctuary. Those are feathers and scales.
We both go into mist, and it hooks behind us.
Those are foghorns.
Wait, and the bird on the high root is a snowy owl
Facing the sea. Its flashing yellow eyes
Turn past us and return;
And turning from the calm shore to the breakers, utterly still,
They lead us by the bay and through the shallows,
Buoy us into the wind.
Those are tears. Those are called houses, and those are people.
Here is a stairway past the whites of our eyes.
All our distance
Has ended in the light. We climb to the light in spirals,
And look, between us we have come all the way,
And it never ends
In the ocean, the spit and image of our guided travels.
Those are called ships. We are called lovers.
There lie the mountains.

That Old Gang of Mine

"Warden, I thank you." "Not at all." He bowed.
With my dress cane, I hit him on the head.

"A stirring evening, Officer." The guard
Blinked at my spinning watch-chain. Then he snored.

"Come out, good thieves," I whispered to the walls,
And heard the fine teeth mousing in the cells.

Sliding the key-ring under the cold bars,
I tiptoed down the hall and out of doors.

The first explosion coughed the windows out;
The second made stones generous to a fault;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The third threw up the prison, clapped its wings,
Squinted the lights, and pierced the sirens' lungs.

Over the rubble in their shredded suits,
Out of the tangle of bent license plates,

Through the dim ruckus between dust and guns,
Came my key men, the unlocked skeletons,

Bumping their knobby knees against the rocks
That once stood tall as hell to shepherd crooks.

"Run for our lives!" I whispered. "First comes grass,
Then shrubs, then trees, then water, and then grace."

Oscar the Bounder ripped his jacket off
And vaulted toward the deep night in the buff.

Phineas the Mouthpiece staggered, his eyes shut,
And hawked to break the thick years in his throat.

Sylvester the One-man Sack-race, self-possessed,
Stalked through the brambles, lofty as a post.

Esau the Actor, two feet, four feet, none,
Rose past the willows, flickered, and was gone.

Then out of the heap, the unpacked bloodhounds came
Groggy but eager, snuffling the old game.

Fit to be tied behind them, stumbling guards
Saw their long leashes snarling into braids

As we went crosspath, taking to our heels
In five directions, tireless through the hills.

At dawn, across the water, over the dunes,
Past the bleak alders and the bleaker downs,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Over the thorn scrub like *cheval de frise,*
I went to meet them, purple with their praise,

And as we leaped and crowed in a shower of cash,
We danced a ring around the burning bush.

Seance for Two Hands

When all the shades could spell
On slates as though at school
Or rap on the wall,
Life was doing well.
Out of the cracks in marble,
From under the lifted table
Came the shape of the soul:
The wind in a shirt-tail,
A fish in a white veil,
The moon behind an owl.
Though put to bed with a shovel
The body like a wheel
Rose from its rut at will
Nor kept the spirit level.

But the dead no longer press
Against the looking-glass.
They have gone out of the gauze,
Away from the feet of yews;
Their lips no longer pause
At the edges of lilies.
Disenthralled from cats' eyes,
Battered from the cows,
Dropped from the breasts of crows,
Driven from the flies,
The ghosts of the latter days
Of the soul's progress
Needle a point in space.
Death alone haunts our house.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PHILIP MURRAY

Epistle to Theon

(379 AD)

Ausonius, ancient, arthritic Consul at Bordeaux
Sends cheerful greetings to rustic Theon at Medoc,
Renowned Squireen, notable tiller of rocks,
Who ploughs the sea as well as the coast
For crops that smell of salt, often caught
In his own nets like a giant porpoise.

His thatched hut, smeared with smoke and soot,
Reeks of sturgeon and bitter tunnies;
He owes all his friends money
And tries to pay with sour fruit,
Cribbed verses of lead, and snowy oysters
Full fat and sweet as their predator.

What is he bungling these summer days,
The chase? He and his scalawag brother
Harried by deer and dogs and highway robbers
Hoping to scare each other into sharing spoils?
Or is he hooked and dragged about the beach
By some outlandish evil-odored fish?

Friend, I might have hobbled the road to Rome
And back again on my rheumatic feet
Since last I saw his lubberly cheeks
Before and after, laughing at my gout.
For one whose cognomen signifies "running"
He is a wounded sluggard's time coming.

Too hefty to ride? Too lazy to walk?
Then let him put that bulk into a boat.
I'll hail his canvas belly at the dock,
With the four-wheeled cart and mules
Reserved for special friends and fools.
If he doesn't come, he doesn't deserve these verses.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fronto to My Lord M. Aurelius Antoninus

(Rome 165 AD)

My lord, have you some words,
Some maxim of philosophy
To comfort your old rhetorician
And his grief-stricken family?

My daughter's only son,
My one grandson, age three,
Dear darling Decimanus,
To bed forever, so early.

Our sweet proconsul of grapes,
Our tender auspex of doves
And sparrows and chickens,
Little boy Love;

Who strewed the courtyard
With tablets and paper scraps,
Those things I wished him to want,
No harm in that;

Who cried "Give me"
Boldly to the sun's face;
Who drowned his doll in the fountain
And frowned at the disgrace;

Who followed me everywhere
Prattling my name;
Who could not be kept indoors,
And wept to play in the rain;

He was as blond, as blue as—
But similes fail me.
What can Reason avail me
For such a loss, my lord?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The child Decimanus is dead.
Can an old man endure?
If I were of iron,
I could write no more.

JOHN HOLMES

Verses in a Very Old Tradition

In our state there is a thruway,
Six-lane thruway, top speed seventy.
From that thruway is an exit,
Exit 13, ramp speed thirty,
At that exit's end, a toll-booth,
Passenger cars, Lanes 2 and 3.
Past that booth you come to a rotary,
Round and wide and Drive With Care.
One light east is Maple Terrace.
On Maple Terrace is a white house,
It says on the mailbox H. J. Smith.
In the Smiths' house is a bedroom,
Master-bedroom, rear, three windows.
In that bedroom a wide bed,
Beside that big bed, on the floor,
Lies a pile of H. J.'s clothes.
In that pile is his gray trousers,
In those trousers is a pocket,
In that pocket a green wallet,
In that wallet is a snapshot.
Snapshot girl, black bathing-suit,
Slim Mrs. trim Mrs. long-leg Smith,
"Honey," a summer twenty years ago.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEN MADDOW

Christmas in Another Skin

I HAD AN EARLY BREAKFAST consisting of three Bloody Marys and a pot of coffee. I had a plane reservation for 7 P. M. out of Washington, D. C.; it was December 23rd last year, when I was still on the road for Slide-Glides. At twelve noon, which is 3 P. M. Denver time, I called up the wife and told her the bad news. The Washington Airport was fogged in, and the flight was delayed until at least 10 tomorrow morning. Then, feeling in wonderful shape, I called Jackson's Wrought Iron Products, and asked them could I borrow a steno to dictate some memos and business details, inasmuch as the hotel typist was visiting her folks in Kansas. To tell the abolute truth, however, I may have had more than shorthand on my mind, for I noticed Jackson Wrought Iron had a personnel policy which didn't disqualify pretty girls, even though they inevitably led to fast turnover, if you get my essential meaning.

Anyway, what they said was, "For you, anytime! Glad to oblige." The girl was supposed to arrive at 4 P. M. sharp. At quarter to three I shaved, showered and shined. I had some contracts to study, but for some reason I became fascinated by the Washington pigeons staggering after each other along the granite window sills of my hotel room, each one of which had a tremendous view of the airshaft. At somewhere past 3:30, I fell asleep with my sharp, black, lady-killer tie on, and nearly choked to death.

To show you my frame of mind, I dreamed I was dictating the following momentous letter:

> Mr. Nate Gold,
> Jackson Wrought Iron Products,
> 4921 Ave. P,
> Washington, D. C.
>
> Dear Mr. Gold:
>
> At the request of our sales representative, Mr. Ben Maddow, we are most happy to send you the following samples of our Imperial Swivelglides. We hope you will

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

find them of interest.

IMPERIAL SWIVELGLIDE IN NATURAL HI-FLEX
No. 440 27 2750 7/8" base and ½" O.D.Cap
No. 441 27 2750 1" base and ½" O.D.Cap

We are looking forward to supplying you with these swivelglides, and if we can be of further help to you, please let us know.

Yours sincerely,

SWIVELGLIDE MANUFACTURING CORP.
(Signed Emile Joseph
Assistant Sales Manager)

Enc.
c.c./S. Scheiber
c.c./B. Maddow

By the bye, you will take notice I had no hesitation in signing another man's name. In fact, it gave me peculiar pleasure, so much so that I hated to wake up. The phone rang. I rose on one elbow. The room was as black as the inside of a licorice coughdrop. But a face in the room was trying to outstare me. I had the impression it was a very small man, with several pairs of brilliant eyes. I stood up hastily. The face swung around. The little man was the pattern of phosphorous lines on my wristwatch. But where was I? I really, for the moment, didn't care to know. It was a pleasure to be anonymous.

It was nearly seven o'clock. I sat, still in silence, on the edge of the bed, and heard my heart go clunk, clunk, clunk; climbing that long staircase that I saw suddenly, with great clearness, has certainly got to end, and not on any particular floor, but broken off, into sheer molding, far up where the building had been left unfinished. It was a depressing thought, and yet not too unpleasant.

Meanwhile, the phone had been ringing for some little time. I walked across the room, turned on a lamp, got a drink of water, flavored it with the Jack Daniels I always carry in my suitcase, and drank it down. Then I brushed my teeth, and, when it rang again, answered the damn phone. It was a woman's voice, the steno from Jackson Wrought Iron. Truth was, I had forgotten all about her.

"Come on up, sweetie," I said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No," said the girl, "I'll meet you in the lobby."

"That's a pretty public place, but all right, if you say so," I told her. "We'll have a little Schnapps, and get acquainted." There was quite a pause.

Then she said, "Well, no, I'll be right by the magazine stand. I'm looking for a book to read this Christmas."

"Pick one I can read, too," I said.

She laughed and hung up. She had a rather sweet voice, but spoke too loudly, as many people do. Still, the magazine stand is just the front counter of the hotel Gift Shoppe, so she wasn't entirely naive. I took the precaution of putting most of my cash between two dirty shirts in the paper laundry bag furnished by the hotel; but kept about fifty dollars in my pocket, which I figured was to be my limit, Christmas or no Christmas.

When I got downstairs and went to the paperbacks, there were five or six women, all of them not unattractive. I realized I hadn't the faintest idea what the girl looked like. I milled around for ten minutes; the women changed, there was a new set of more or less attractive faces; I began to get panicky for some unknown reason.

Then I heard my name, pronounced by a bellhop, from about the level of my left knee. The hotel thought it was the height of swank to hire a dwarf. Anyway, I went up to him and handed him some loose change, about 24 cents, I think it was.

He said, "Mr. Madden? Young lady waiting for you at the bar."

I said, 'Thank you. My name's Maddow, by the way."

"I don't know about that," he told me.

What could I do? I followed him. She was fussing with some pink sort of concoction, specialty of the house, I think she told me. I sat down and ordered a Martini in the rough. I advised her to do the same. There's nothing healthier than straight liquor.

"How are you doing?" I asked her.

"Oh, I'm bored," she said.

"I like a lot of action myself," I told her.

She wore a sort of dark suit, with a hat of the same color. There was something fresh-faced and yet stupid about her; at the one and the same time, she was both phlegmatic and nervous. Do you know what I mean? She kept stroking her throat and looking at me over her left shoulder.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally, she said, "Hell, you're the wrong man, you know that? I never saw you before in my life. The man I'm supposed to meet is Ben Madden. He's in Radio Parts, Television, and Transducers. What are you?"

"Me, I'm just a jerk," I told her; and took her by the left elbow, very firmly, and steered her back to the Information Desk, and told the clerk this pretty young lady wants Madden, not Maddow. He looked it up, and said, "Mr. Madden is in 1021."

It got me mad. I said to him "My name's Maddow. I'm the fool that's in 1021. Underheated and overcharged. I only got one towel this morning." The girl laughed. It had changed her face; she was nice, she was almost intelligent, though in a far-off and faint-hearted way.

The clerk told me I was mistaken; that if I was actually in Room 1021, which he doubted, my name would be Madden. Ben R. Madden. I vehemently denied it. For instance, I pointed out I had no middle initial.

He said, "Our records indicate that you do, Mr. Madden." He rang for the dwarf, and said to him, leaning way over the counter, "Boy, you got this all wrong. This young lady wants Mr. Maddow, not Mr. Madden."

The dwarf was exceedingly upset. He departed without a word, but I could hear him calling out, in his miniature voice, far inside the bar, and paging me by name. It was hopeless. I took the girl around the waist, I had to hold her up, she was laughing so hard. It was an adorable trait. We went back into the bar, ordered two more Martinis, only doubles, and I slapped a whole dollar bill onto the miniature rear admiral, and told him to go play with himself.

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Madden," he said.

"How the devil do you know my name?" I asked him bitterly.

"I never forget a face," he said, and vanished waist-high.

The girl said, "Poor Mr. Madden! What must he think of me? I promised to meet him two hours ago."

I examined the girl carefully for the first time. The best that can be said for her, is that she was rather ill-assorted. She had a heavy mouth, small breasts, and again rather large hips; she was certainly no sex-pot, and probably terrible on the horizontal, and very sensitive to boot, these amateurs generally are; but she was ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tremely, intensely sweet. She took my hand, and said, "What's your real name?"

"McGuire," I told her.

"Well, McGuire," she went on, "you know my dearest wish for Christmas time?"

Well, here was the old gimmick, and not too well concealed, either. How can it be? "No, tell me," I said.

"What I want for Christmas, McGuire, is a baby girl."

"Well," I said kindly, "there's a hell of a lot of them waiting in the wings."

"Oh, I know. I know!" she said. A tinge of color spread over her neck and face. "I was married to such a nice boy, but we had no children. Though I tried desperately."

"That's not the way to do it, baby," I told her.

She frowned, in a kind of peculiarly desperate way. "You know names," she said, "change your name, change your life. My name's Carole Jean, and when I came to get my birth certificate, the damn doctor we had, he was a cousin of the family, he had put down Gladys Pearl, so I feel the same way as you, McGuire. I don't know who I am. Will you order another one for me? Maybe that will straighten me out." And she flicked at the empty glass with her fingernail. It gave out a clear, sad, ringing note, very much like the girl herself.

"You've had enough," I told her.

"Thank you," she said and reached and held my hand.

I swear though, I had no intention of saying any such thing. In fact, I said to myself, "Now I've done it. Killed one more opportunity. As usual. So you're a nice guy. See if that makes you happy." That's the way I generally talk to myself; never a note of kindness.

"You know, McGuire," she said, "my kid brother went and married a girl with the same name. Carole Jean. I mean it! And she had twins right off. In fact, they were a little previous, if you want to be mean and count up on your fingers. Well, and I always felt these babies were rightfully mine. Crazy thoughts go through my head. Do you?" And she touched her lips to my cheek, very simply, as though she were her own child.

"Come on," I told her, "I'm going to buy you a great big Christmas present."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We walked out, holding hands. There was a winter haze, the air was brittle, and full of the squeaks and squawks of traffic, and the voices of shoppers among the neons. Garish blue sparks rose from the trolley busses as they made the corner turns over the wet contacts. We stood on a traffic island on Pennsylvania Avenue, caught between red and green, and kissed. After that, she held onto the belt of my overcoat with both hands. We walked on. Carole Jean said, as we came toward the river, our faces wrinkled with resistance to the cold, "I think I love you, McGuire."

"Naturally," I said.

"I had to tell you," she told me, "because it might even be true."

"What do you want for Christmas that is reasonable?" I said.

"Nothing at all."

"Oh, come on."

"Really, I don't."

We went into a big department store and rode the escalator up and then down again. Carole Jean leaned her head against me, all the way, standing one step below. She absolutely refused to buy anything. She wanted me to save my goddam money, or so she said. Because at ten o'clock she was going out of my life: at 11:30 P.M. her second husband got back from work, and he liked a hot dinner, and it was all going to end the same, wasn't it? No matter what you did? "I once intended to change my name to Guinevere, you know? The Princess? King Arthur—all that jazz?"

She looked as though she were thinking deeply. Then she went on, "But it comes out wrong, numerically." She began to cry, but quite softly and politely. When we came to the foot of the escalator, and were surrounded by a pushing, dreaming, heavy-footed crowd, she excused herself, and went to the Ladies', and came back much, much happier.

"I washed my face in ice cold water. I love to go swimming b.a. Did you know that about me?"

I said to her, "Look, sweetie—I want to buy you a present. Please! Please—let me have that pleasure."

"No, McGuire," but then she said, "All right. You can do this. You can pay for my taxi."

I was forced to agree. We went out of the department store on the Avenue P side. The air smelled wonderfully of the coming snow. A Salvation Army man in rimless glasses was ringing a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

small bell. He had an imitation kettle, covered with wire mesh, so that no sneak-thief could put his hand into the pot. I gave him the rest of my small change. The girl floated along in a sort of daze, her head down and holding both my hands.

We walked to the stand on the corner, and I was just holding open the door of the foremost taxi, when a burly man without an overcoat came up behind us, and said, "Miss, may I speak to you a moment?"

"What for?" I said.

Carole Jean turned, one foot in the open door of the taxi.

"If you'll just come back with me into the store," he said. His voice had no expression at all. The three of us just stood perfectly still, a tableau of some sort of misunderstanding. Then, quickly, quietly, discreetly, Carole Jean leaned into the taxi, slid over the seat, opened the door on the opposite side, and ran across and around traffic to the further side of the street. I and the burly man ran after her.

As she reached the opposite curb, she was struck lightly in the fanny by a newspaper delivery truck; and she stumbled and fell face down into the gutter. I reached her a moment later. She had gotten up and was sitting on the curb, brushing off her coat, and wearing a dead, placid face. At her feet were the smashed fragments of two huge 32 ounce bottles of Chanel 5. The scent was monstrous.

"I steal all the time," she told me. "I can't help myself. I've tried everything. I hope you'll forgive me."

The burly man took us both back to the store, and up the freight elevator to the Security Office on the 21st floor. Carole Jean kept moving like a child, back and forth and around.

I kept saying to him, "I'll pay for the perfume! I'll pay! Don't you understand me?"

"She's done it before, on five separate and different occasions," explained the burly man at last. "The store's getting tired of it, and I'm getting tired of it, and I think she's getting tired of it, too."

So we went into his office and sat in a couple of horrible folding chairs; I watched a girlie calendar as he phoned the police; it's strange what will fascinate you at a time like that. Ten minutes passed, while he fiddled with papers and asked perfunctory ques-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions. "We've got to teach this little girl a lesson, Mr. Madden."

"His real name is McGuire," said Carole Jean, very mildly.

A faint siren slid down the scale, somewhere outside, and stopped. The burly man stood up sadly and looked out the window.

"Well, there's the fuzz at last," Carole said.

"Stealing before Christmas's just not right," said the burly man.

I said to him, "There's two sides to every story."

"That's right," he said, "And they're both going to end the same place. The State Farm for Girls."

"Now, sir, wait just a minute."

"I hope they give her one to ten," he said to me. But I thought I detected a note of hesitation in his voice.

"Ever hear of *Les Miserables?*" I asked him.

"What's that?" asked the burly man.

I had about three or four minutes while the police made their way up in the elevators.

"Les Miserables," I repeated.

"Lay whom?" said Carole Jean.

"See that? A man like you ought to be careful with quail like this," he advised me.

"Now, wait. This is a book about a priest," I told him.

"Don't appeal to my human feelings, please," he said. "I've got top people over me and low people under me. I'm squeezed. I can't afford to give away what little sympathy I've got."

"He's right, oh, he's double right," said the girl. Somewhere along the line, she had shifted sides; she was no longer with me, but with the burly man. He had the power. I didn't. The whole situation upset me more than I can tell you.

"A man stole a silver candlestick," I went on, as firmly as I could. "He stole it from a priest. All right, what did the priest do?"

"Hate to tell you," said the girl.

"I'm not the man to knock religion," said the burly man.

"The priest found him! Blessed him! Gave him the other silver candlestick!" I cried. "Because he felt if the man stole it, he needed it."

The girl said, "Priest or no priest, he must have cracked his nut."

The burly man turned on her fiercely, and said, "Now will you kindly shut up!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, but it stands to reason!" she told him. "There's no such book. McGuire just made it up out of his head. The whole thing."

The burly man said, "Mr. McGuire is a good man. Which you are not."

"If you'd only let me pay for the perfume," I told him. "Forgive and forget."

"I'm ashamed to see you hooked up with a girl like this," he told me. "Why prevaricate? It's not going to do any good."

"Listen! Listen!" I cried. "This was a book by Victor Hugo." It hurt me that someone would say that I had gone and invented a book; I've done a lot of shady things in my time, but this was absolutely out of my line. I went to the office window, and opened it about two inches. "The both of you make me feel a little sick." Way down below, the Salvation Army man, with his rimless glasses and military cap, was jingling that damn little bell. "Wonder what his name is. Maddow, no doubt," I muttered.

"Damn those cops," said the burly man. "What's taking them so long?" He turned and opened the office door as wide as he could. It led down a corridor, past a pile of empty cases, toward an exit light, which indicated the back steps. "Beat it," he said very quietly to the girl. She looked at me, rose from her chair, wiped some oily stain on her skirt. "Go on, beat it, beat it!" and he added, "And leave this poor gentleman alone."

"I don't know, I really don't know," she said, scraping away at the stain of perfume, "These things come over me. I have to hide things in my blouse or under my skirt." She turned and looked; and not at me, exactly, but somehow past me, as if to an enlarged image, was it Maddow or Madden or McGuire?

I did a cruel thing. I sat there. I mean I sat there and didn't stir from the folding chair. She stuck out her tongue at me, and went out into the corridor. We could hear her feet scraping on the metal re-enforcement plates as she went down the stairs. The funny thing is, there were stairs exactly like that, in the dream I had when I dozed off in the hotel that afternoon. Only those stairs went up, and these went down. I suppose you'll point out that stairs generally go in both directions, but that's not my point; and if you don't understand, I can't explain it to you; I don't know that I understand it myself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I smoked one of the Security Department's best quality cigars, while the burly man went on and on about different thieves and shoplifters which he had known. There was a camaraderie between him and them, it appeared; they were in the same game, though on opposing sides; whereas I, and other plain citizens, were and would always be, entirely on the outside, spectators of the essential drama, who might be allowed in from time to time, but only out of kindness.

Finally, I put out the cigar, we shook hands, and I left. There were pigeons on the aluminum sill of his window, and pigeons on the street, and pigeons on all the statues and monuments as I walked.

A light snow was falling, but only, it seemed, in the lights of the street lamps. The long, wide steps of the big public buildings, the rounded feet of the columns, the colossal statuary, sheltered, or in the open, had all been polluted by numberless, and very likely nameless, pigeons. They had eaten some wild winter berry that year, and their dung was deep purple on all of Washington, D. C., staining the famous granite, the marble, and the bronze; until the snow, falling continually till my plane left the next morning, little by little dissolved and covered it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAY SWENSON

God

They said there was a Thing
that could not Change
They could not Find
it so they Named
it God
They had to Search
so then it must be There
It had a Name
It must exist Somewhere
The Name
was God
the Thing
that could not Change
They could not Find
it What is Lost
is God
They had to Search
for what could not be Found
What can't be Found
is Changeless
It is God
The Name
is clue The Thing
is Lost
Somewhere
They Found
the Name
The Name
is Changeless
God

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Universe

What
is it about,
the universe
about
us stretching out? We within our brains within it think
we must unspin the laws that spin it. We think
why because
we think
because.
Because
we think
we think
the universe
about
us.
But does it think,
the universe?
Then what
about?
About
us? If not, must there be cause
in the universe?
Must it have laws? And what
if the universe
is *not about*
us? Then what?
What
is it about
and what
about
us?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Night Practice

I
will
remember
with my breath
to make a mountain,
with my sucked-in breath
a valley, with my pushed-out
breath a mountain. I will make
a valley wider than the whisper. I
will make a higher mountain than the cry;
will with my will breathe a mountain, I will
with my will breathe a valley. I will push out
a mountain, suck in a valley, deeper than the shout
YOU MUST DIE, harder, heavier, sharper, a mountain
than the truth YOU MUST DIE. I will remember. My
breath will make a mountain. My will will remember to will. I,
sucking, pushing, I will breathe a valley, I will breathe a mountain.

CHRISTINA BRATT AND ROBERT BLY

Translations from Gunnar Ekelöf

Gunnar Ekelöf was born in 1907. Most critics consider him the greatest living Swedish poet. The inward thought of the Orient and the surrealist poetry of France have been his deep concerns, and have provided foundations for his own poetry. Yet his poetry is perfectly Swedish. His imagination in "Trionfo della Morte" for example reminds one strongly of his younger contemporary, Ingmar Bergman. There is a similar walk on the borders of religion and witchcraft, and inside the work of art visual images that seem to float.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In America, we assume that only a cracker-barrel sort of poetry can be popular. Swedish poets, particularly Ekelöf, do not follow this old rut of thought. Ekelöf is the most difficult Swedish poet, and yet his audience is large. His new books of poems are published in numbers comparable to printings of 200,000 in the U. S. In his poetry there are linked successions of thoughts which are difficult to follow. These thoughts are embodied in high-spirited and colorful language. He is an uncomfortable poet, who tries to make the reader conscious of lies. His work attacks the moralistic personality. He divides all personalities into the innocent, the moralistic, and the uncommitted. The innocent temperament is primitive and intuitive; the uncommitted is the most highly advanced. The moralistic personality, overpowering today in numbers, sees in life only the fight between the dragon and the knight. It does not see the virgin at all. But the virgin who does not participate in the battle is life iself. What is behind and beyond the battle between good and evil is more important than either. As he says, "There exists something that fits nowhere."

—*R.B.*

"There Exists Something That Fits Nowhere"

There exists something that fits nowhere
And yet is in no way remarkable
And yet is decisive
And yet is outside it all.
There exists something which is perceived just when it is not perceived (as silence)
And is not perceived just where it is perceivable
For there it is exchanged (as silence) for another thing.

See the waves under the sky. Storm is surface
And storm our way of seeing.
(What do I care for the waves or the seventh wave.)
There is an emptiness between the waves:
Look at the sea. Look at the stones of the field.
There is an emptiness between the stones:
They did not break loose—they did not throw themselves out,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They lie there and exist—a part of the rock sheath.
So make yourself heavy—make use of your dead weight,
Let yourself break, let yourself be thrown away, fall,
Ship-wrecked on rocks!
(What do I care about rocks.)

There are universes, suns and atoms.
There is a knowledge carefully built on strong piles.
There is a knowledge, unprotected, built on insecure emptiness.
There is an emptiness between universes, suns and atoms.
(What do I care about universes, suns and atoms.)
There is a second viewpoint on everything
In this double life.

There is peace beyond all.
There is peace behind all.
There is peace inside all.

Concealed in the hand.
Concealed in the pen.
Concealed in the ink.
I feel peace over everything.
I smell peace behind everything.
I see and hear peace inside everything,
One-colored peace beyond everything.
(What do I care about peace.)

Trionfo Della Morte

Three knights stepped out
lifted three virgins on the saddle
Three knights stepped up on their horses
with falcons on their gloves
Who cuts down, and who binds up?
In a lonely valley full of trees
they met the six open coffins
three women corpses, three man corpses in shrouds
in a lonely valley full of trees

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lured there by their falcons
But in the bushes stares
the owl with yellow eyes

The plague had not yet reached that valley
Who cuts down, and who binds up?
The plague was everywhere present in that valley
That was during the death of the Unicorn
That was during the watching of beautiful corpses
That was during the violation of virgins
beneath the yellow witchlike gaze of the owl
The ladies and lords rode on
icecold in their bowels, stiffened in their limbs
and what they did to each other
that I will not tell
Each knows best himself

But there were, in that city,
three men beggars whom they all knew
three women beggars whom they all knew
Who cuts down, and who binds up?
In the six caskets they waited, hidden
as if in a winding sheet of terror and hope
stored up and kept only in their waiting
as if in a winding sheet of terror and hope
They did not see the journey of the ladies and lords
They did not see the flight of the falcon
or the valley or this forest
They saw only clouds in the light heavens

"The Knight Has Rested . . ."

The knight has rested for a long time
straight in the saddle
high in the mountainous land
so desolate that the eye hesitates
Wonderful stretches of smoky hills that never come near!
Beneath and far off his companions are chattering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The falcon waits on his breast
it has laid its head on his cheek

O strange tenderness in my heart!
—Then he raises his hand
and the bird flies out
away
He sits there and watches it climb
in gyres always higher and higher
He rests still straight in the saddle
when the night falls
Feared night!
Longed-for night!

"When One Has Come . . ."

When one has come as far as I in pointlessness
Each word is once more fascinating:
Finds in the loam
Which one turns up with an archeologist's spade:
The tiny word you
Perhaps a pearl of glass
Which once hung around someone's neck
The huge word I
Perhaps a flint shard
With which someone who had no teeth scraped his own
Flesh

"So strange to me"

So strange to me
this rose, this thing delicately bursting out
this absent thoughtfulness
or light over a turned-away cheek . . .
As on a spring day
when you sense something and hold it firmly
an instant, a second
unchangeable
something that shall never turn to summer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BENJAMIN DE MOTT

The Little Red Discount House

EARLY LAST SUMMER THE AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES and Educational Services Incorporated began circulating a sheaf of mimeographing entitled, "Preliminary Draft of a Proposal for the Support of a Curriculum Development Program in the Humanities and Social Sciences." The aim of the agencies was to win support for a new project for the reform of elementary and secondary school teaching. The reformers were, to a man, reputable academics—social scientists, historians, and teachers of literature—and their "Preliminary Draft" contained matter of interest to a wide variety of observers. For Foundation men there were enticing work schedules and modest budgetary estimates. For scientists there was pleasing testimony that the people in the other culture were docilely following the patterns developed by mathematicians and physicists in improving instruction in their fields (first a summer meeting of professionals to frame new approaches to old subjects; next a joint effort by university, secondary, and elementary teachers to produce textbooks embodying the fresh ideas; thereafter experimental testing of the texts in classrooms, a summer of intensive revision, national publication of the texts, and finally the institution of retraining programs for teachers committed to the use of the new books). And for the idle gossip there were a few amusingly discussible appendices—a self-teasing glossary of terms favored by the reformers at their meetings (*"INTERDISCIPLINARY*—a state devoid of discipline in which it is permissible to interrupt whoever is speaking"), a page or two on the best way of teaching reading and writing which concluded, with winning embarrassment, that "reading and writing is best self-taught" (the banger of this soft drum was Professor Mark Harris).

As the appendices suggest, the reformers were at pains to avoid the ordinary styles of educational crusade. Eschewing the rhetoric of light-bringing, they presented themselves simply as people engaged in creating "specific units" that might be "spotted through the elementary curriculum or that might be considered as forming a network as they are tested and more are added": they offered no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rationalization of their programs, and seemed mainly bent upon establishing themselves as easy riders. But despite all the engaging self-deprecation, a revolution plainly was implicit in their work. Examination of the "units" offered as samples disclosed that their primary goal was nothing less than a direct encounter between the childish mind and intellectual themes at once powerful and unfamiliar to the elementary or secondary classroom—items that could not have been settled upon merely in hope of stimulating the teacher's ingenuity. The themes in question—the relation between a person's interest and his perspective, the necessity of understanding a point of view as an agent of deflection—retain, to be sure, little grandeur or elegance when adapted to the requirements of Innocence. (One unit called for the teacher to introduce "tape record narratives of the same football game by a television announcer, a sophomore girl, the winning coach, the losing coach, the left guard's mother, and an eight year old brother of one of the players. Tie these in [the instructions went on] with movies or photographs . . . to further illustrate what each person is seeing at specific points throughout the game. This illustrates 'selective perception'—the idea that a person's point of view or 'role' influences what he sees.") But the homeliness of the material did not alter the fact: the apparent center of the ACLS-ESI program was the conviction that the time has come for the ground themes of modernity to be sounded in every glassy corner of the American public school.

That representatives of disciplines not usually pleased with each other were able to arrive at this decision without vicious quarrel is less mysterious than might be supposed. Historians as well as social scientists have caught glimpses of Marx, Frazer, Freud, and the other giants who forced the growth of awareness that beliefs and ideas are gestures of competing interests, that the god-term itself is culture-bound, that no man's unprobed word is to be trusted. And while only a few of the great literary heroes of the century have been notable discounters, great hordes of MLA members nevertheless stopped buying books—i.e., points of view—at list long before Korvette's picked Mrs. Lindbergh as a loss leader. The principles behind the reverse price-fixing among litry folk were tricky and exacting. (So much off the overt argument of any book for roles and points of view, as a matter of course—but then be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yond this, so much off for rationalization, repression, the lessons of the symbols, imaginative designs, private vocabularies, a dozen similar cues to interest.) But the principles were well-regarded. The case is, indeed, that contemporary academics in virtually every field became habituated long ago to the idea of selective perception—which is to say that the success in recovering a sense of the notion fresh enough to breathe humor into schoolbooks qualifies as an act of historical imagination.

There are, however, other acts to be performed before the entry of the notion into red schoolhouses and junior highs can rouse more than guarded satisfaction. It is clear that perspectivism is a splendid resource of the mind—a strong defense against ideology and fanaticism, a first-rate incentive to subtlety, complication, and (possibly) acceptance of otherness. It is no less clear that training people up from toddlerdom in this way of thought is altogether feasible. And it is likely (given the perpetual crises of Cold War) that most of the old humanist charges against the discounters—as for example that in multiplying viewpoints they obscure values—will soon strike Old Humanists themselves as lacking in pertinence to the age. (In the past the charges were most popular, in any event, among observers who, when asked straight off where they took *their* stand, preferred not to commit themselves "at this time.") But when these concessions are made, it remains true that perspectivism is itself a mode of expression, and, as such, an agent of interest, an instrument of repression, a potion best cut with a cautionary word. The thinker who seizes on the new mode of thought as his mode (whether in the name of the giants, or merely in the name of wit as defined by Mr. Eliot) needs to study it negatively for a moment—in order to find out precisely what happens when the stuff of his *own* particular learning is no longer bought at full price. Failure to do this means advocating a "sensible scaling-down" of all intellectual claims, while consciously or unconsciously exempting one's own claims from sacrifice. And that way lies megalomania.

In the discipline of literature the best current laboratory for scrutiny of the effects of "discounting for viewpoints" is found, as everyone knows, in the writings of the school of Kenneth Burke. No literary theorist of the century has done more than Burke to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

acquaint students of imaginative writing with the implications of the perspectivist revolution.[1] In his early books (*Counter Statement, Attitudes Toward History, Permanence and Change*), as well as in the treatises on Motives, the now retired sage of Bennington argued with endless inventiveness for the necessity of Seeing Around the spoken or written word, the announced intention, the "successful" enterprise in persuasion—in order to register the extent of the wordman's probable deflection from the X that is not words. The argument was never simple in its assumptions. It neither grovelled in the slough of logical positivism nor aspired to faith in a truth Out There, waiting to be discovered by the steely mind stripped of all deflectors. It held firm instead to a spiky set of contrarieties: language deflects and interest determines (in part) the nature of the deflection: every definition creates a situation; my definition, hence my situation, may or may not be yours; another vocabulary can always be imagined; there is virtue in "perspective by incongruity" and danger in "temporalization of essence"; society as a community of meanings, a catalogue of created scene-act ratios, continues to exist. Always, though, the theorist's eye (no flatterer) was on the limits of the strategies composed and the positions upheld. You must track down the symbols in order to find the meaningful—*tic* ("The poet . . . squints or jerks when some words are spoken, otherwise not. You disclose the 'symbolic organization' of his tic when you have found the class of words that provokes it"). You must discount not only for the form of the expression but for the moment of biographical and historical time ("Often you cannot take a sentence at face value [you do not 'understand the meaning' until you know the biographical or historic context subsumed by the speaker when he spoke it"]). And you cannot allow an unmixed motive to stand ("a 'comic' term for the essence of motivation . . . expects an act to be moral, and it expects the actor to 'cash in on' his moral assets"; "in keeping with our distrust of both 'perfectionist' and 'invertedly perfectionist' motivations, we should feel justified in never taking at its face value any motivational reduction to a 'simple.' ")

The body of writing Burke has built up on these principles is prized on several grounds. It is first of all the work of that rarest

[1] Other students as well. *Permanence and Change*, for example, is often recommended as a work indispensable for beginners in social sciences. See C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of men, a good humored original genius. It is equal to the age, conversant with ranges of intellection unheard-of by most litterateurs, impatient with elegant, self-indulgent ignorance. It is free of fairy aestheticism, fully responsive to the continuum of human activity, quick to perceive ventures in ordermaking wherever they occur, disinclined to profundum about the separateness of life and art. And finally, unlike most criticism, it is generous to its reader: it tells him he has an active mind, is agile and quick, relishes complication, is scornful of emotional posturing and human enough to enjoy being silly now and then. As the chief critical end-product of perspectivism it is, in short, superb testimony that the influence of the idea can be humane.

But of course—to round on virtues in the desiderated manner—the theories and the theorist have limits of their own. As should be admitted, attempts to name these limits in political or literary terms have usually come off badly. The best-remembered of them are those of Sidney Hook and R. P. Blackmur. The former made his complaint in a famous *Partisan Review* episode of the late thirties; he condemned Burke as "an apologist . . . of the latest piece of Stalinist brutality" (the Moscow trials), claiming that *Attitudes Toward History* sought to rationalize in "basic metaphors and psychoanalytic myths" deeds and necessities of the totalitarian state that were "too stark and bloody" to be rationalized. The latter made his complaint in "The Critic's Job of Work"; its point was that the perspectivist's method broke down all distinctions and could be applied "with equal fruitfulness to Shakespeare, Dashiell Hammett, or Marie Corelli." Both charges imply that Burke is an insensitive man—oblivious at once to brutality in life and excellence in art—and the implication is false. But, to the extent that Burke's accusers were not merely repeating mechancal formulae, they were respondng to a central quality of his writing—the quality of imperviousness. And it is this quality, this set of the perspectivist being, that rouses distrust even in sympathetic observers aware of the pivotal place of resistance in the ruling strategy of the whole.

As goes almost without saying, the modes of imperviousness—the term means: rigid disbelief in the possibility of direct encounter, obstinate standing off of any and all "descriptions," refusal to accept the other man's metaphor, tone, or joke—are as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

various as the subjects Burke has attacked. One mode is teacherly:

> Once when I was analyzing the symbolism of sun and moon in Coleridge's poem, "The Ancient Mariner," a student raised this objection: "I'm tired of hearing about the symbolic sun in poems, I want a poem that has the *real* sun in it."
>
> Answer: If anybody ever turns up with a poem that has the real sun in it, you'd better be about ninety-three million miles away. We were having a hot summer as it was, and I certainly didn't want anyone bringing the real sun into the classroom.

Another is Prussian militarist cum Dr. Bovary. It appears in the few essays that address themselves (with an iron inattention to tone) to masterworks—the essay on "The Grecian Urn," for example, of which the following is the final paragraph:

> We may contrast this discussion with explanations such as a materialist of the Kretschmer school might offer. I refer to accounts of motivation that might treat disease as cause and poem as effect. In such accounts, the disease would not be "passive," but wholly active; and what we have called the mental action would be wholly passive, hardly more than an epiphenomenon, a mere sympton of the disease quite as are the fever and the chill themselves. Such accounts would give us no conception of the essential matter here, the intense linguistic activity.

Another is perky-boyish-stubborn, as in Burke's replies to complainants like Hook and Blackmur. He will not "answer" these chiding parental voices: no concession that a brutal deed was done, only a reiteration that historical events are first of all changes in the way human beings choose to define themselves (innumerable choices are possible); no avowal that Miss Corelli is not Shakespeare, only an excursion on the inertness of the classifications of "good taste."

There have been occasions, true, on which this extraordinary contention against "natural" response, or openheartedness, is given over—the essay on "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle' " is a notable one. But by and large the critic is unrelentingly hostile to Normalcy. And in his latest and most self-regarding book, *The Rhetoric of Religion, Studies in Logolology*,[2] Burke remains fiercely unsubmissive to the other writer's voice. The book opens, in the theorist's characteristic fashion, with trumpetry on the theme

[2] THE RHETORIC OF RELIGION, STUDIES IN LOGOLOLOGY, by *Kenneth Burke*. Beacon Press. $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that words are not things ("Language, to be used properly, must be 'discounted' . . ."; "all words for the non-verbal must, by the very nature of the case, discuss the realm of the non-verbal in terms of what it is not"). Activizing as ever, it establishes that religion is a form of behavior, redefines behavior as verbal gesture, advances the proposition that "what we say about God will bear a likeness to what we say about words"—and justifies it with a swift clutch of analogies (God is to Christ as thought is to utterance; the succession of words in a sentence is to the meaning of a sentence as time is to Eternity). Thereafter the reader is offered an intense, lengthy, speculative Seeing Around of Augustine's *Confessions* and the opening chapters of Genesis, sections that conclude—on the basis of the grammar of the Biblical verses—that it is in the nature of language itself to construct "providence" or "divine foreknowledge" in principle: ". . . language is just made that way. And in its will is (our definition of) peace." The book ends with a dialogue that shoots off a thousand paradoxes on The Word, words, and conceptions of mystery, and there is enough brilliance in these pages, and twice as much wit, to support a thousand-acre seminary. But the unhearingness *is* muscularly resolute.

To repeat: the resoluteness is the key to the method. The critic never asked to be thought of as a man concerned with works of art "for themselves" or as "experiences" to be lovingly recreated; he never answered eloquence with eloquence.[3] He invariably asserts at the cruces—sometimes in ecstacy—the primacy of his interest ("Then comes what is, for our purposes, the most astoundingly perfect passage conceivable"—this about a moment in the *Confessions* that is, naturally, astounding and perfect for many purposes beside those of the "comic" perspectivist). Everything in his almost hostile manner of address to the work announces that because it is a confession, a description, a vocabulary, a set of terms, it must necessarily and inevitably be a deceit. Moreover: grounds for forgiveness other than the man's frankness lie ready at

[3] Burke possesses a high eloquence, but here as elsewhere it is released not by the other voice, but instead by one or another psycho-linguistic quirk that attracts his eye and tickles him into poetry—as in the following snippet:

> Intimacy with a woman must always argue special intimacy with some word or words like or nearly like the sound of her name. So probably they [the names of Augustine's "toys"] are there [in the *Confessions*] shining out like unseen stars, ambiguously split between terms in the constellation of the divine and terms for the problematic body.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hand. Who, after all, would argue that Augustine's tale of his conversion ought to convert a modern reader? Can it really be said that the exasperation occasioned by Burke's harping on Augustine the rhetorician ("an inveterate wordman" and "former word-merchant" occur on page after page) is a major irritant? And is it not true that the hunt for cues and buried symbols does eventually come out at a trove? (The word-merchant's magnificent passage on the union with God as unutterable silence is shown convincingly to "tie in psychologically with motives vestigially 'infantile.' ").

The questions are not easy to dismiss. But, confronting Burke in the context of general education, the reader does tend to turn away from them—in the direction of the obvious deeper problem. Taken to its end, bureaucratized, brought the full way down into the arena of day-to-day, might not the method easily be put in service of the cause of moral laziness? You cannot *teach* caritas, sympathy, respect for the other—but will these be strengthened if you teach their opposites? Discount the ideal and the labor of *recognition,* and how much of "the humanities" remains?

The possibility exists, needless to say, that intense imperviousness is simply part of the personal configuration called Kenneth Burke, rather than a telling mark and sign (among literary men) of the perspectivist disposition of mind. But examination of other writers of the school lends little backing to this theory. The most substantial recent work produced by a leading member is Stanley Edgar Hyman's *The Tangled Bank.*[4] The literary community owes many debts to this writer. His reviews in the *New Leader* are sharp, forceful, usually unsmutched by schmerz or phony brio. *The Armed Vision* has been a kind of sacred book for two generations of graduate students in English, strengthening their will to believe in the profession at just the moment when the latter presents itself most forcibly in the likeness of a poolshow. And in the new book mentioned, an important bureaucratization of the (Burkean) Imaginative, he has assembled invaluable materials for a perspectivist account of the development of the modern mind. But there is not much in the volume to suggest that imperviousness is a personal tic of the original (Burkean) genius.

As indicated by the subtitle—*Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud*

[4] THE TANGLED BANK, by *Stanley Edgar Hyman.* Atheneum. $10.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as Imaginative Writers—Hyman is assessing the heroes of perspectivism: at last the revolution catches up, as it were, with the revolutionaries. To speak of him as a bureaucratizer of Burke is only to say that each of his chapters on the thinkers in question takes roughly the form of an attempt to specify, from a series of viewpoints, the proper rates of discount to be applied to their versions and visions of experience. The movement of the chapters is from biography through history into formal analysis. The characteristic gesture is of knitting contexts:

> In reality, of course, Darwin's teleology is as sacred and supernatural as Paley's, but with all-seeing Mother Nature substituted for God the Father. It was a fit covert religious revolution for Victorian England, but it also had a particular fitness for Darwin, whose deep identification with his dead mother and submission to his overwhelming father suggests a classic Oedipal situation.
>
> His [Darwin's] final moral imperative is curiously akin to Freud's concept of civilization as the taming of the instinctual life: 'The highest possible stage in moral culture is when we recognize that we ought to control our thoughts, and "not even in inmost thought to think again the sins that made the past so pleasant to us."' The quotation is from *The Idylls of the King*. It shows as well as anything could . . . that *The Descent of Man*, this bold attack on Victorian orthodoxy, was the salvation of Victorian orthodoxy in the only terms, imaginative and poetic, in which it could still be saved.

The most obvious repression is of the instinct for reductive explanation; deflecting agents are ceaselessly renamed in multiplying contexts. (The tendency of Freud's work to "temporalize" belief in a "primal cause" into an origin myth must be placed not only in the context of Freud's guilt about his attachment to Fliess, but in the context of his imaginative fascination with the mode of Conan Doyle. Frazer's unclarity about the relations between history and myth, Christ the man and Christ the Saviour, must be placed in the context of contemporary religious argument—"he feels caught in the middle, a Straussite Unitarian fending off the Trinitarian worshippers in one direction and the Bauerite atheists on the other"; and also in the context of the uncertainty of his design—"perhaps the vastness of the book [*The Golden Bough*] really does break down").[5] And the most interesting crisis trace-

[5] Hyman intends the word "temporalize" to bring Burke to mind here; in point of fact the observation about Freud's explaining present conditions by inventing a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

able to the grand strategy takes the form of an Evaluative Situation, wherein the writer reprices back to list the object he has discounted—and then attempts to buy it off himself with a flourish.

An uneasy flourish, necessarily, because the discounter—using perspective by incongruity, analogical form, and a dozen other ploys—has driven hard bargains throughout. The "dramatic and tragic vision of life" in *The Descent of Man* "comes from Darwin, rather than from his subject matter." Frazer's "imaginative reconstruction of the performance of the mysteries in describing the great hall of Initiation of Eleusis seems to have more in common with the Radio City Music Hall than with anything that could have transpired at Eleusis. . . ." Freud's "fullest account of the bedevilled ego is a blare of metaphor." Neither Marx's nor anyone else's economic theories are "true or false in any determinable sense." And *Capital* is best seen as:

> . . . a melodrama called something like *The Mortgage on Labor-Power Foreclosed.* In the first act the villain mistreats the virtuous wife and injures her poor little child; in the second act the young laboring hero himself is maimed and sits paralyzed in a wheelchair while the child dies; in the third act they are thrown out into the snow and take refuge in a miserable hovel; in the fourth act the discovery is made that the villain stole the mortgage originally and has no legal or moral rights over our heroes. It needs a fifth act in which the working-class family is rescued and restored to its happy home, but only the proletarian revolution could produce that final curtain, and Marx could not finish *Capital* without it.

But a return to Fair Trade is attempted, once the pricewearing is finished. The strategist begins his final chapter with abuse of those who have refused to take in the meaning (discounted? undiscounted?) of the writers he has been assessing:

> It is not that there has been a religious revival so much as an obscurantism revival, a disinterest in knowledge as a good in itself, perhaps a new failure of nerve. . . . The entrenched enemy that Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud each battled in his own fashion, the bigoted ignorance and superstition that masks as religion, has survived their onslaughts and is apparently stronger than ever.

---

mythic past comes directly from *The Grammar of Motives* and *The Rhetoric of Religion.* On Hyman's *"Acknowledgements"* page Burke's name is placed third in a list of main influences (after the Cambridge School of anthropologists and Empson), and it appears only six times in the text. Burke's vocabulary, however, is used repeatedly, and his injunctions to commentators, historians, and critics are faithfully heeded; plainly but for him this book could not have been written.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He then sheds a seemingly disingenuous tear:

> Apart from the influence of religious obscurantism, our century generally seems less interested in ideas than the last, seems to care about them less and to take them less seriously. Some of this is an unfortunate effect of the discounting Marx and Freud have taught us; it is so easy now to dismiss any idea as an ideology or a rationalization.

And thereafter, restoring metaphor as a value in an admirably bold stroke ("perhaps all science is ultimately metaphor, as Freud suggested in his open letter to Einstein"), he ends with a single powerful sentence of approbation: "These great enlightenings are humanist; philanthropic in the root sense, for the love of man."

The strategy of this closing is not without awkwardness, as the summary implies. But what is of interest is that the awkwardness plainly is traceable to the tendencies of mind under discussion here—ferocious resistance, stony imperviousness. Evidence in support of this point can be found in every section of Hyman's book, but particularly in the chapters on Marx and Engels. The latter pages are filled with observations on Marx's imaginative design, dramatic stance, and key metaphors (many of these are likely to seem puzzling to readers with a clear memory of *Capital* itself). But they are also dense with terms of another order—numbers, summaries of statistical tables, quotations from the reports of "firsthand observers" (of non-Marxist deflection) of the conditions of the working class. The reader is given information (originally supplied by Marx but not quarrelled with by Hyman) about towns in which a quarter of the babies born die within a year of birth, about steel-pen and tile plants that employ children four and five years old, about class differences in life expectancy in cities like Liverpool and Manchester (15 years for workers, 35 years for the upper middle class), about tuberculosis rates (an increase of from one in 45 to one in 8 in a decade of lace-making), and about living space (18 people to a room in Newcastle). Only a page before the account of *Capital* as melodrama the writer repeats Marx's quotation from "a magistrate of the lace trade" on child labor:

> Children of nine or ten years are dragged from their squalid beds at two, three, or four o'clock in the morning and compelled to work for a bare subsistence until ten, eleven, or twelve at night, their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> limbs wearing away, their frames dwindling, their faces whitening, and their humanity absolutely sinking into a stonelike torpor, utterly horrible to contemplate.

Against this language Hyman's heavy irony about a first act portraying a "villain [who] mistreats the virtuous wife and injures her poor little child" clanks incommensurately. The iron will to unresponsiveness has produced, on schedule, yet another analogical form—melodrama—but in meeting the schedule the author has revealed little except his terror of sounding like a bleeding-heart. Embarrassed, the reader withdraws, distrusting any cause that requires him to see sweated children as metaphors.

If this tic, or tactlessness, appeared only once, concern about it could reasonably be belittled as finkery. But in truth it is never out of sight. A chapter or so after the cited passages, Hyman writes about the descriptions offered in Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*—and distances them in similar fashion. He quotes Engels on the life of a working woman in Manchester:

> M. H., twenty years old, has two children, the youngest a baby, that is tended by the other, a little older. The mother goes to the mill shortly after five o'clock in the morning, and comes home at eight at night; all day the milk pours from her breasts, so that her clothing drips with it—

and an account of the life of Sheffield laborers:

> The cottages are old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavement; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions, the atmosphere is poisoned by the effluvia from all these, and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall factory chimneys. A horde of ragged women and children swarm about here, as filthy as the swine that thrive upon the garbage heaps and in the puddles.

Then, faced with this sentence of his author:

> Yet one is left in doubt whether even this terribly torturing death is not a blessing for the children in rescuing them from a long life of toil and wretchedness, rich in suffering and poor in enjoyment,

he remarks: "When Engels falls into sentimentality, which is not infrequently, we may think of Dickens . . . Engels [redoes] the death of Little Nell."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The question of moment is: what in the quoted sentence is sentimental? Where in the sentence are there feelings in excess of the value of the object? Why is the modern tongue incapable of saying that a sweated child is better off dead, is blessed in extinction? Admittedly the man who raises the question is obliged to suspect his own "interest": I am an opportunist eager to prove that the critic is a hardrock and I am sweet? I am a wailer big with hysterical cries?—as: The world is not words! the Jews were not burnt in dictionaries! the past is not fiction! Frazer is not Cecil B. DeMille! Something somewhere by someone *can* be taken straight!—But after all the "necessary" self-laceration the problem and the sensible conclusion still stand forth in full sight. The problem is, simply, that the last proud sentence of *The Tangled Bank*— ". . . philanthropic in the root sense, for the love of man" —establishes that the author has fine feelings, but establishes it later than might have been hoped. (Or, saying it again, the hooks and eyes that connect the sentence—it occurs 450 pages deep in an oversized ten dollar book—with what has gone before have crept down under the facing and are hard to reach.) And the conclusion is that the literary perspectivist, for all his whirling shifting agility, is finally a man who does hate being moved.

In itself this conclusion is hardly an adequate basis for an assessment of a complete teaching program—the program that features the viewpoints of Losing Coaches and Eight Year Old Brothers. But from this it doesn't follow that reading the school of Burke in the context of educational reform, scrutinizing it for hints as to the nature of future gains and losses under the regime of the perspectivists, is an altogether improper act. (Such a reading does acknowledge the school's significance, after all, even as it claims—in good Burkean fashion—that pedagogical revolutions themselves must not always be taken on their own terms.) As for the losses; the thought of them will turn no reasonable man into a counter-revolutionary—for there are few alternatives to the regime. Linguistic fundamentalism, as represented by the Rosicrucians and Boehme and the John Webster who didn't write plays, is a pretty artifact, but vapid in its nostalgia for the old language of the old nature of the old Adam wherein every verbal sound contained the nature of the thing and no gap existed between

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

verbal expression and reality. Linguistic progressivism from Leibnitz to the psycholinguists has its brisk utopian note, but also a constant overtone of kookieness. And the toughminded objectivism of the shorthaired ladies (Ayn Rand) and sternbrowed men (Norman Mailer) is mainly dumb. You have only to shift your gaze from these items to the beautifully complicated human landscape of Burke, or to the often admirably inclusive "history" of Hyman to discover why the perspectivists are a modern center of hope.

The word to be said, in sum, *is* merely cautionary—meaning the word to be spoken to the humanist-perspectivist who is about to bring his vision out of the library and into the world of men, or of children. This enthusiast must tell himself that the future will be a place in which more will be seen or encompassed—every manifold stretching and stretching—every schoolboy peering over, through, around, underneath: for this is the way Causes are made. But, even as he warms to the prospect, he needs to remind himself that the dilation of vision anticipated is more dependent upon the development of new perspectives, new languages, than upon the rigorous eschewal of the old; only if he does this will his Cause escape reduction to Technics. He must hear every word of the Burkemen: no perspective exempt from scrutiny, only multiplicity can be The Rock, the comic view is essential. And then as he repeats the lesson to youth he must corrupt it with gentleness: by choosing a tone expressive of the possibility that some acts of Seeing Around are more painful to witnesses than other acts, by implying that if imperviousness is the means, sympathy is the end, by contradicting those who think comic means A Joke, and by remembering, finally, that neither in mortuaries nor elsewhere is it demonstrable that wisdom and silence are the same.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

THE NEW THEATRICAL SEASON began with two productions of Brecht's *Mann ist Mann:* the 1925 version, translated by Gerhard Nellhaus and performed by The Living Theatre as *Man Is Man;* and the version of a quarter century or so later, further adapted by Eric Bentley and performed by The New Repertory Theatre as *A Man's a Man.* The rationale, if there was one, would seem to have been that although (as Brecht set out to prove) one man is as good as another, one *Man Is Man* is not. And though concerning the first part of the proposition we may entertain some doubts, the second has been proved beyond dispute.

Mann ist Mann is the story of a meek little Irish porter, Galy Gay, whom a machine gun unit of the British Indian Army impresses into service to replace a missing member, "lost" while the squad went robbing a pagoda. After some elaborately tragicomic intimidation and brainwashing, the measly porter becomes a murderous war machine and assumes the identity and destructiveness of the missing Jeriah Jip with a vengeance or two. But the play is not, as has sometimes been simple-mindedly assumed, a mere demonstration that the shortest distance between Milquetoast and Butcher is a straight party line. For the devious Brecht gives us, in a kind of triple exposure, two other changes as well: that of Jeriah Jip from a callous machine gunner into a bogus divinity enthroned by a sinister bonze for the purpose of mulcting the faithful; and that of the dreaded sergeant, Bloody Five—who for overindulging his lust loses face before his men and shoots off his genitals to spite his face—from a merciless martinet into a pitiful nonentity. What Brecht seems to be saying is that one can go from peaceful to warlike, from (soldierly) inhumanity to (godlike?) superhumanity, from a (military) superman to a poor fish that can fill neither jodhpurs nor trousers; that these transformations can be inflicted on man by others, by himself, or by an alliance of the two; and that, in all cases, whether one's former state was better or worse than the subsequent one, is hard —if not impossible—to determine.

But, as I suggested, it is easy to assess which production is, without being perfect, superior. It is the Bentley version at the Masque Theatre. To begin with, because Brecht's second (actually third) recension is more many-faceted and diverting; secondly, because Mr. Bentley has at last come through with a truly convincing English rendering; thirdly, because the staging and design are more resourceful; lastly, because at least some of the actors here get the better of stylization rather than flattening out under it. Two of the machine gunners were particularly impressive: Clifton James as an ominously affable Polly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Harvey Solin as a bloodcurdlingly understated Uriah. John Heffernan was agreeable enough as Galy, but not quite straightforward and ordinary; Olympia Dukakis, as Widow Begbick, canteen- and whoremistress to the Indian Army, by whom every man—whether or not England expects it—does his duty, was perhaps a shade too agreeable. Agreeable is the word for most of this production, in fact.

Not so at The Living Theatre, where glum's the word. Or stark, or constipated. The ambition to do this earlier and more ascetic version in a bleak form is not wholly unfounded, and, certainly, the one thing that must not be done to Brecht is to make him "nice." But one should bear in mind Brecht's own warning that it is not enough for the theatre to feed our cognitive faculties: "Our theatre must provoke the *joy* of perceiving, organize the *fun* in the transposition of reality." There is very little joy—though much shouting—to be had at the LT's *Man Is Man,* and as for fun, lines that earn well-deserved laughs at the Masque are swallowed up at the LT in a mirthless silence, like rivers in the Gobi Desert. It is typical of the LT conception that the talented Judith Malina should play Widow Begbick in such a way that there is no good reason to imagine the randiest Tommy preferring her to a female yak. And Joseph Chaikin as Galy Gay, no doubt because of a misreading of Brecht's account of how Peter Lorre played the part in 1931, has about as much variety of message and tone as a prayer wheel. But William Shari's loweringly adenoidal Uriah is a stunning creation. Where, however, both productions are equally unsuccessful is in the music, the only difference being that Walter Caldon, at the LT, stole from both Weill and Paul Dessau, whereas Joseph Raposo, at the Masque, plied his depredations, like a purist pilferer, on Kurt Weill only. To get the spirit of Weill's and Dessau's music is, of course, desirable; but to get its litter is not.

Still, the student of modern theatre and the Brecht enthusiast would be well advised to see both productions and amalgamate them in the mind's eye: a little of the LT's asperity would be proper leavening for the Masque's coziness.

On Broadway, things got under way with an adaptation of C. P. Snow's *The Affair* by Ronald Millar, a Hollywood Englishman. Snow's novel about politics and justice at Cambridge University does for the Academy roughly what Miss Rona Jaffe's *The Best of Everything* did for the white-collar girl's New York. The effect on stage was rather like that of a dramatic reading of *Spoon River Anthology* by a small-town poetry society at the local high-school auditorium. (The uncut text, of course.) Mr. Millar's idea of adaptation—not that any is ever good—is to change a line that in the novel reads "a photograph had been enlarged, what Francis called 'blown up' " into "blown up—you know—enlarged"; and, for all I know, if he had continued thus reversing every blown-up sentence, a modicum of interest might have been generated. As it is, we get mostly cant like: "I repeat, unless any of you can think

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a nicer way, I'm ready to blow the whole thing wide open!" which recedes farther yet from vitality under John Fernald's plodding direction. Despite everything, Kenneth Mars, Christopher Hewett, Francis Compton, and Elizabeth Hubbard give surprisingly fine accounts of themselves; Brewster Mason and one or two others do what they can with thankless roles; and Brenda Vaccaro, Keith Baxter, and Patrick Waddington manage, no less surprisingly, to increase the surrounding dreariness. Perhaps the most thought-provoking feature of the evening was that the bookshelves of Sir Lewis Eliot's London flat were stuffed to bursting with copies of the American edition of Sir Charles Snow's novels. Now since Sir Lewis is, in fact, Sir Charles, this set up one of those marvelously endless sequences of which devotees of the old Quaker Oats trademark are justly fond, and in which viewers of *The Affair* could, if they were lucky, lose themselves.

Two new playwrights of promise appeared off-Broadway. In the case of William Snyder, it is rather more than promise: *The Days and Nights of Beebee Fenstermaker* is a play that has many virtues; what it does not have is a clear point of view and a cohesive structure. It tells the story of a provincial girl gradually deteriorating in a large American city, apparently because she is gifted enough to be almost an artist, but not so gifted as really to be one. In back of her is a stifling family past that, in the form of a fairly inept and schematic subplot, keeps irrupting on the action—if a set of casually conjoined episodes constitutes an action. The author never makes clear whether the fault lies in our stars, or in dear Beebee (that she's an underling), or in an invincible hostile environment—but even that would not matter if he did not, in rapid succession, keep pointing all three ways. Nonetheless, he is a fine observer of human nature; an imaginative creator, or recreator, of human utterance; and, in a broad and generous way, a friend to humanity. Many of his scenes have a quiet urgency hovering between wistfulness and hilarity, and a quality of modest, civilized perspicacity, so that one watches Mr. Snyder's play with the same astonished pleasure with which one might open the morning newspaper and find that, though the news was still appalling, it was written up in good English, with no misprints and a genuine style. And in the third act, when Beebee and her simpleton lover-to-be listen to a recording of a Fenstermaker family reunion of years ago, and past and present become a melancholy, somewhat hallucinated, palimpsest, the play achieves extraordinary pathos, poetry, and artistic dignity. Moreover, the direction and several performances were commendably professional, and the work of Robert Duvall, as a thoroughly charming nitwit, and of Rose Gregorio, who played Beebee with remarkable sensitivity to the character's subtlest tremors and modulations, distinguished.

William Hanley's two one-act plays, *Whisper Into My Good Ear* and *Mrs. Dally Has a Lover,* are only potential drama, but the potentiality is not so pure as not to take on some dramatic, or at least verbal, flesh.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The first play is about two aging, relatively high-class bums, who have resolved to commit suicide together at their favorite spot in Central Park, where they have sat and griped away the years, and where now they pry on a pair of lovers, gripe some more, and decide not to commit suicide after all. Even from such an inadequate summary this should emerge as straight Beckett; but just as one could hardly have reprehended a young playwright of half a century ago for writing intelligently digested Ibsen or Chekhov, there is little to scorn in Mr. Hanley's genuinely felt evocation of a modern master. It is delightful to hear one bum admit to the other that once upon a time he was guilty of drug addiction, but "anyway, that was fifty years ago—before it was so popular." Or consider this rebuke to a fellow frightened by a rat in the park: "Even on Park Avenue there are rats.—When was the last time you saw a rat on Park Avenue?—They're there, they just don't have the bad taste to show themselves." Or this exchange about the hopes one of them had: "Dreams, big dreams. Then, after a couple of years, they get smaller and smaller.—Not sanforized!—You can say that again!—Not worth it." The other play, about a neglected lower-class wife with a poetic soul who takes up with a neighborhood boy who might be her son, is rather more commonplace and, at times, even vulgar. It is early Tennessee Williams, spiced with the usual rosemary for rue and (un)savory for box office. But even here, despite dross like "You got to think quick when you're being raped; if you lose your head, you've had it," there are moments in which the grand old commonplaces still yield a grain of poignancy: "You ever notice how sometimes you get talking to each other to avoid talking to each other?" In the first play, Boris Tumarin and Roberts Blossom were more than adequate; in the second, Robert Drivas, a young actor to reckon with, did some excellent things as well as some others which were clichés.

And speaking of clichés, there appeared at the Cricket Theatre a perfectly horrid little play entitled *A Whisper Into God's Ear* by one Samuel Birnkrant, who, it must be admitted, assembled every known dismal commonplace about middle-class Jewish life. These he kept piling up around the actors until they were immured alive. Plays of this kind can best be described as verbal ghettos, and that Jews should tolerate such representations of themselves (where, *mutatis mutandis,* Negroes would be, quite rightly, up in arms) attests either to masochism or to narcissism, neither of them a quality worthy of encouragement.

Meanwhile back on the Great White Way we witnessed the arrival of *Come On Strong* by Garson Kanin, which, if the most elaborate public-relations campaign can be called coming on strong, certainly lived up to its title; but if what happened after the curtain went up has anything to do with it, did not. For we had here the same sort of plot and dialogue that Mr. Kanin has, with or without conjugal assistance, purveyed to stage and screen over a number of years, and which has finally made us reach the Point of Not Wanting to Return. Who cares

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about a pair of militantly charming people who, beginning in bed (unmarried), end in bed (married, or soon to be so), with the plot concerned with nothing so much—so desperately much—as how to keep off the happy ending long enough for three marketable acts to elapse. We are confronted, then, with one factitious misunderstanding, change of heart, cross purpose, curious coincidence, arbitrary switcheroo after another. The humor consists of exchanges like "Did I ask you?—No. That's why I told you." Or: "Whom did you marry? Anybody I know? —Not even anybody *I* know." Or: "Ten thousand dollars wouldn't buy you a membership in the Bel Air Country Club.—I'll tell you what it would buy: twenty thousand banana splits." But I liked it particularly when philosophy was being mixed in with the wit, as in: "Everybody needs something, that's a fact. Me, I pray.—I didn't know you had religion.—I haven't. That's one of the things I pray for." Or, better yet, when Van Johnson delivers a hair-raising monologue about the Sickness of Now, or Carroll Baker another one about a wedding night with an older, more reverent man which made her feel "like I've just been born."

Van Johnson's performance consisted mostly in assuming various postures suitable for the covers of beefcake magazines, sticking his behind out at the audience, whenever possible, at a rakish angle, and reading his lines as though he had not learned not only how to read lines but even how to read. As for Miss Baker, that former Baby Doll, *i.e.*, secular Shirley Temple, now, fully grown up, she is no more interesting than her sacred counterpart. She was hung with Oleg Cassini's garish wardrobe, and it was hard to tell who did less for whom. Curiously enough, this play, after being soundly and concertedly trounced by the reviewers and scheduled to close after four performances, continued to run because of what was announced as "audience demand." I went by the Morosco several times, and always saw few spectators; I must assume that the audience was making its demand *in absentia*.

Stop the World—I Want to Get Off, the British revue, is really a sort of burlesque monodrama with music. For although the gifted Anna Quayle is very much in evidence, she tends, like the several other girls in the cast and one or two little boys, to become just a straight man or prop helping the central character live out his life in this vaudeville begotten by Brecht upon Marcel Marceau in one of the darker corners of the London music hall. It depends, therefore, on the talents of Anthony Newley, who acts, directs, and, with Leslie Bricusse, wrote the book, lyrics, and music. And these talents are considerable, though not, in the end, quite sufficient. As a straight or musical comedian, Mr. Newley can be inventive and uproarious (as in John Cranko's *Cranks,* which was a far better show than this); but as a mime, thinker, and cynosure, he is a little less than infallible.

The idea here is to represent the life cycle of *l'homme moyen sensuel*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from birth, through obscurity and success, to the grave—or, rather, immortality. And though birth and copulation are conscientiously enough evoked, death, I fear, is shirked a little. Still, there is much to be said for trying to fuse such genres as pantomime, vaudeville, burlesque, cabaret, revue, musical comedy, and psychodrama into one glorious hash, but one does wish that Mr. Newley had done as much for this new type of theatre as he has done for the old type of megalomania. Thus one wishes that the political satire were a little less elementary, that repetition, with or without slight variations, were considered less devastatingly funny, and that someone had had the good taste to rewrite the ill-timed take-off on Marilyn Monroe. Yet such as it is, *Stop the World* is better than a number of highly successful items left over from last season—one clown of Mr. Newley's is still worth a thousand of Herb Gardner's—and for that we should be grateful, especially when the weirdly acerbic and droll Miss Quayle is around, looking like a graffito Goya might have drawn on a Spanish privy.

O Say Can You See! at the Provincetown Playhouse is an insanely amiable pastiche of all those movie musicals of the forties chock full of war bonds and Betty Grable. It is a show that one can laugh at without quite knowing why, but without having to feel ashamed of it. In the midst of its folly, which is as great as that of what it parodies, and, therefore, boundless, it maintains an instinctive graciousness and ingenuity, and a connoisseur's pleasure in the preposterous. The numerous young people responsible for the various aspects of this often inspiredly corny cornucopia are all to be commended for their ideas or attractiveness (whichever is called for in each case), and Nicolas Coster, Elmarie Wendel, and Joel Warfield give performances that I am still hugging to my memory.

There is much about *Seidman and Son* that belongs in the same category as *A Whisper in God's Ear (vide supra)*, but, to be sure, an expensively slick production can do something to mitigate extreme rigors. Nothing, however, can alleviate the wan humorlessness of lines like "Extrovoit? A new name for fresh?" or the wan platitudinousness of Son to Father, "What's the matter, Pop? We don't talk the same language any more!" Every once in a while, however, something faintly amusing does tickle both the one ear on which it goes in, and the other on which (equally fast) it goes out, as in the case of, "You got an apartment big enough for five people?—How big are the people?" There is also a greater than usual proportion of good playing in *Seidman and Son;* and in Stewart Moss, Broadway has a new young actor who is as accomplished as he is personable, and who can actually make a stock sticky part nothing short of appealing—and all this without a trace of the fashionable mannerisms.

In dealing with *Mr. President,* the new Irving Berlin, Howard Lindsay, Russel Crouse, Joshua Logan musical, the reviewer faces a serious problem. If he were to say simply and honestly that it is the most inept,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insipid, infuriating *and* boring show in years—if not ever—he is bound to excite unhealthy curiosity. Indeed, if someone else were telling me of anything as multifariously rotten, nothing (I bow my head in shame) could keep my vile curiosity away from it. But what if I assure you that you will witness the presidency of the United States, the Russo-American conflict, the whole problem of human dignity (to say nothing of survival) reduced to idiot-school jokes and noisomely decomposing commonplaces? Thus when the President is depressed by the horrors of today's politics (oddly enough, alone of all the cast, Robert Ryan does hang on to a shred of likableness), his family performs a dumbfoundingly tasteless piece of clowning called "Laugh It Up," and presently all is well. When the President's plane arrives, unwanted and unannounced, on a Russian airfield at night, we must watch him address the gaping handful of musical-comedy Russians with apothegms like "We both react the same way to happiness," which his playboy son who has been studying do-it-yourself Russian forthwith translates into flawless verbiage and impenetrable pronunciation—whereupon the President loses out politically at home because of the immense popularity he has gained in Russia . . . well, I could go on, but why relive the humiliation of having sat through two hours of this without the courage to boo? And lest anyone should think that Irving Berlin's songs provide the slightest palliative, let me assure you that the old man can no longer put three notes together that make the feeblest musical sense; as for the lyrics, they are either: "You're wrong as wrong can be,/ I'm not the man for her,/ She's not the girl for me . . ./ The girl that I marry will have to be/ Meat and potatoes, like me . . ./ Meat and potatoes mixed with fried eggs and ham/ Don't mean a damn . . ." or else, the President singing: "If this is flag-waving/ Do you know of a better flag to wave?" As for the dialogue, it hurtles headlong from "There's tootsie, playing footsie" to Mrs. President interrogating her husband, "Oh Steve, what's happened to our patriotism?" To have just heard Kennedy's speech on Cuba, and then listened to the stage president declare, "The country is in danger!" but add, "Hats off to America!" and with this earn the only burningly passionate kiss his wife dispenses, made one wonder whether the graver danger lurked on the outside or within? Let me implore you, then, to abstain from this abortion, beseeching you, not as Cromwell did Parliament, "by the bowels of Christ," but, if you know what is good for them, by your very own.

With *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the Broadway season at last comes into possession of a play. By now everyone must know that Edward Albee's drama concerns an all-night drinking session in a New England college. The hosts, a jaded, middle-aged failure of a history professor and his despair-maddened wife, taunt and torment each other and their guests, an *arriviste* of a young biology instructor and his vapid little bride, who retaliate as best they can but end up, in turn, lacerating each other and revealing their own insecurity or hysteria.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is also a plot device about an imaginary son of the elder couple that has to be painfully exorcised from their fantasies by the end of the third act, though one wishes that he could have been exorcised from the author's fantasy before the beginning of the first. The most obvious achievement of the play is that by a generally efficacious mixture of wit, cuttingly or touchingly true dialogue, and often staggering savagery, it gives one's emotional and intellectual apparatus a well-sustained, extensive and meaningful workout.

Mr. Albee's play assumes, artistically speaking, its rightful place in the tradition which Rilke, in a letter to his wife, correctly traced to Baudelaire's "Une Charogne." It was necessary, wrote Rilke, for artistic contemplation to be able to see "even in the horrible and the seemingly wholly repellent, the Existing, which, along with all else that exists, is valid. . . . A single turning away ever, thrusts [the artist] from the state of grace, makes him altogether sinful." Following in the footsteps of O'Neill and Williams, Albee looks unflinchingly at the putrescent cadaver, or near-cadaver, of our collective decency. But, with Albee, there is a catch. There is an old anecdote about a husband who, tied up, has to watch his wife being raped. When the assailant has fled, she unties her husband who promptly slaps her face. When she cries out in protest that she was overpowered, and could not help being raped, the husband retorts, "Yes, but you could have helped enjoying it." The trouble with Mr. Albee's play is that, instead of being motivated by stern impartiality or a fierce muckraking fervor, it seems mostly to be getting nasty little kicks from kicking society in the groin.

What is seriously wrong here is not that the structure of the play resembles too closely that of *Long Day's Journey Into Night,* or that the equivocating little flicker of hope at the end smacks strongly of Tennessee Williams, or that there is a little too much transposing—whether it be Albertine strategy or simply grafting hip talk, beatnikism, and the more fearfully flamboyant aspects of Fire Island on a college community which, however corrupt and sterile, would not boast of a decay that lights up like neon signs. No, the main deficiency here is that, though Albee has splendidly mastered Baudelaire's, or Rilke's, lesson, he has not drawn the corollary conclusion: that for the artist to avert his gaze deliberately from what good persists in the world is equally delinquent and debilitating. Not that Mr. Albee does this continually; but he does it a little too often, and a little too gleefully. I object, not on moral, but on strategic grounds: the playwright is just as apt to miss his mark—the audience—by overshooting as by undershooting.

Still, Mr. Albee has made a significant and, if I may be allowed a vanishing paradox, beautiful contribution to the Poetry of the Obscene. There are times when his somberly flaming sarcasm reminds us more of the Earl of Rochester than of Baudelaire or Bosch. But even Rochester is not to be dismissed lightly. And when at its best, Albee's furibund

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fun produces lightnings like the definition of insanity as "Just the refuge we take when the unreality of the world weighs too heavy on our tiny heads" (note the double-edged sword), or like the richly metaphoric evocativeness of a middle-agedly professorial but youthfully cruel wife's exclaiming as she finds all her victims temporarily out of her range "Abandonèd!" How gravely and acutely, with just one accent, learning is ridiculed!

The performances, except for Uta Hagen's tendency to ham, are all imposing; Arthur Hill's history professor is more than that: a major creation in the contemporary American theatre. So, too, is Alan Schneider's magnificent staging which finds patterns of movement and vocal music befitting the author's variety of invention. And not the least salute must go to producers Barr and Wilder, who have demonstrated that for hardly more money than was needed for some of Off-Broadway's more pretentious undertakings, it is possible to bring an important play to Broadway, and, while the handsome profits are being counted, make it count as art.

B. H. HAGGIN

Ballet and Music Chronicle

MY PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES OF THE BOLSHOI BALLET included the filmed *Giselle* and *Romeo and Juliet* and a *Giselle* at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1959. The *Giselles* revealed the strength of the company—its performances of the classics in which one saw the secure and beautiful operation of a large group of dancers who were not only highly accomplished but adequately rehearsed; the *Romeo,* with its story-telling in Soviet gigantesque style, revealed the company's weakness—its lack of new ballets of the quality of the old. And the same strength and weakness were evident in the program of three small pieces that I saw last September (by accident I missed seeing the big classics and the big new work, *Spartacus*). On the one hand the fourth act of Petipa's *Bayaderka* was made enjoyable for a spectator of today by the performance of the company's first dancers, Maya Plisetskaya and Nicolai Fadeyechev, three accomplished lesser female soloists, and the precise *corps.* On the other hand the more recent fourth act of Nina Anisimova's *Gayane* offered only a succession of brilliant numbers in Caucasian style. And Asaf Messerer's new piece, *Ballet School*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—which like Harold Lander's *Etudes* offered a series of sequences exercising the dancers in movements ranging from children's practice at the *barre* to spectacular feats of star soloists—merely presented one dancer or group of dancers after another performing one sequence of movements after another. The dancers included the most brilliant members of the company, whose movements were exciting to see; but the sequences were not, as they had been in *Etudes,* made into an integrated progression with the varying textures and the developing structure that produced the cumulative effect of a ballet.

Interested in what sort of conductor Lorin Maazel had grown up to be, I attended his concert with L'Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française at the new Philharmonic Hall in Lincoln Center. This was after the hall's opening week in which a great deal of adjusting had been done to improve what one heard in it; but what I heard sitting in row LL of the Orchestra was still unsatisfactory. The sound of Mendelssohn's lightly scored *Italian* Symphony was not something all around me, as in the usual hall, but instead something at a great distance in front of me—so great a distance that the flutters of woodwinds near the end of the first part of the third movement were almost inaudible. In this work the orchestral sound was natural, luminous, well balanced; but in the more heavily scored music employing more brass, and especially in the final section of Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloë* Suite, it became raucous and unbalanced, with the drums in particular almost thunderous. Maazel was not responsible for these defects; but the excessive whipping up of the tempo of this section of the Ravel piece was his; and so was the speeding up of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* to a tempo in which the last scene wowed the audience but was deprived of proper articulation, shape and effect. As a musical performance, then, the *Petrushka* was poor; but as orchestral execution it was brilliant, testifying to the powers of both orchestra and conductor. These were employed with more satisfying musical results in the performance of Mendelssohn's symphony that was admirably paced and shaped as well as precise and finished in execution and lovely in sound. The performance of Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune* also was fine —though with one passage where Maazel's sharply whipping beat had no relation to the quietly flowing playing of the orchestra, and was seemingly something done for the audience. At this concert, then, Maazel's operation was technically highly competent but musically uneven; but I can add that at the Metropolitan a few weeks later his pacing and shaping of *Don Giovanni* were flawless.

Philharmonic Hall was even less satisfactory for the recital of Eleanor Steber, who sounded miles away from where I sat in the rear of the first balcony (called Loge) under another balcony (called First Terrace). Not so far, however, that I didn't hear the spread, unfocussed and wobbly sounds that Steber produced in the grandiose declamation of the first song, Beethoven's *Die Ehre Gottes aus der Natur.* In the quiet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

songs of Beethoven that followed, in which she didn't have to push for big volume, she operated with restored control and security that enabled her to produce sounds of lovely quality and to deploy them in the musical phrase with distinguished art; and this beautiful singing continued in the group of early songs of Alban Berg, which were interesting as examples of his effective expressive writing in the traditional style he was to depart from. But the control and security were absent in the final Strauss group, in which the voice was tremulous and unfocussed and incapable of a sustained phrase even in quiet singing. It was saddening to hear for the first time diminished vocal powers that did not provide a secure basis for distinguished musical art.

After these experiences it was a relief and a pleasure to hear again the normal sound of music in a normal concert hall. Actually what I heard was the exceptional sound of the Philadelphia Orchestra in Carnegie Hall, at the first of a special series of concerts of this orchestra presented by the Carnegie Hall Corporation. And actually I was there because of my interest in Klemperer's performances of Beethoven's *Pastorale* and *Eroica* Symphonies. There has been in England recently the same excitement about Klemperer, and specifically about his performances of Beethoven, as there used to be about Toscanini, with talk of the similarity of Klemperer's operation to Toscanini's in its strict obedience to the letter of the score, and the consequent similarity of Klemperer's performances to Toscanini's in authenticity and effectiveness. This talk was contradicted by the performances I heard in Carnegie Hall. It is true that Klemperer, like Toscanini, had the orchestra play with strict obedience to Beethoven's every direction for loud and soft, for crescendo and decrescendo, for legato and staccato. But he did not exact from the orchestra the obedience Toscanini exacted to Beethoven's directions for tempo. The English writer Spike Hughes reports in his book, *The Toscanini Legacy,* that at the rehearsal of the *Eroica* in London in 1937 Toscanini stopped the orchestra after the first few moments and shouted: "Is not Napoleon! Is not Hitler! Is not Mussolini! Is *Allegro con brio!*" And an N.B.C. musician told me of his stopping the orchestra in the second movement to say: "You play *funebre;* I want *marcia.*" His concern for the meaning of the words was of course a concern for the expressive character of the music that dictated the words; and it produced a performance of the *Pastorale* in which each movement had the lilting flow called for not only by the directions *Allegro ma non troppo, Andante molto moto* and so on, but by the character of the movement, a performance of the *Eroica* with the energy, the tension and intensity this work calls for. Whereas Klemperer's disregard of Beethoven's directions and the character of the music produced strange slow-motion performances which made the *Pastorale* graceless, the *Eroica* nerveless. But these somnolent performances excited the audience in Carnegie Hall to cheers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The opening of the first building of Lincoln Center was the occasion for a New York *Times* supplement that included an article by Virgil Thomson on opera in America, in which he wrote that our composers have been unable to satisfy the public's interest with viable works because they haven't been taught to deal with the specifically operatic problems of choosing a text with suitable verbal and dramatic values and of writing for the English language and for the human voice. But I would say the composers have exhibited these deficiencies in addition to the primary one that Thomson didn't mention. A composer of good opera must be first of all a composer of good music, and the writing he adapts to words and voices must be worth listening to for its intrinsic quality. It was such music that made Thomson's *The Mother of Us All* and Copland's *The Tender Land* works which deserved the places in its repertory that the New York City Opera persists in not giving them. And it is their lack of such music that has been the important deficiency of the works of Carlisle Floyd, Douglas Moore, Vittorio Giannini and the rest that the company has wasted productions on. Later in his article Thomson wrote that "with every composer in the country writing operas and every house . . . producing them, the mere volume of this effort will give birth to a 'school' "; and "if this happens, quality will develop automatically; it always does." But again I must point out that it does, and will, only if the members of the school have the powers as composers that Floyd, Moore and Giannini lack.

For *The New Yorker's* Winthrop Sargeant the quality has already been achieved in notable degree in those works of Floyd, Moore and Giannini; and not only quality but interesting growth, which was shown last year in Moore's *The Wings of the Dove,* one of "the strongest and most effective new operas produced anywhere in many decades," and this year in Floyd's *The Passion of Jonathan Wade,* a "musically quite inspired work" by one of "the most gifted of America's younger operatic composers." One can understand that all this would be heard by a critic who hears in Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* a mere famous musical conversation piece that is beginning to sound dated, but hears a great opera in Montemezzi's *L'Amore dei Tre Re* and "the closest thing to a great work of art that has appeared in music during the past generation" in Shostakovitch's *Leningrad* Symphony. But what actually was to be heard in Moore's attempt at something more sophisticated than the simple inanities of *The Ballad of Baby Doe* was the painfully feeble results achieved with more inept use of more elaborate means; and this is true also of Floyd's attempts at something more advanced than *Susannah:* his *Wuthering Heights* two or three years ago, and *The Passion of Jonathan Wade,* produced by the New York City Opera last fall. This work exhibited the deficiencies of text (Floyd's own) and of writing for the voice that Virgil Thomson spoke of; but the cruelly prolonged screaming in her highest range that Phyllis Curtin was required to do several times was not just bad

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

writing for the voice: it was bad music, the result of an attempt at expressive intensity that failed abysmally. And the work was a series of such attempts and failures—concerning which I must report however that every attempt which failed for me succeeded for the enthusiastically applauding audience in City Center.

The New York City Opera has had many good singers and a few good conductors; but its scenic designers and stage directors, with rare exceptions—Rouben Ter-Arutunian, Otto Erhardt, William Ball come to mind—have combined little skill with a predilection for damaging innovation. The *Carmen* I heard in 1956 was performed on a permanent construction of three sloping platforms with two girders forming a V over the central platform—all of which didn't even suggest the scenes of the work and got in the way of its action. And the permanent platforms with changed decorative details that Gordon Micunis provided for this year's new *Carmen* not only didn't create an acceptable public square or tavern or mountain ravine but didn't satisfy the requirements of the action and were responsible for some of the awkwardnesses and absurdities in the staging attributed to Roger Englander—an outstanding example being the entrance of Escamillo in the second act. And whereas in 1956 there had been at least the well-articulated musical performance conducted by Morel, this time there was only beautiful singing by Claramae Turner in a performance rattled off insenstively by Felix Popper.

And finally the song recital of the soprano Rita Streich, which had me wondering how it was that her deployment of a fine voice in well-shaped phrases didn't produce effective and affecting statements of the songs. It wasn't the unvarying crystalline timbre of the voice; for Elisabeth Schumann's voice also had been unvarying in its individual bright and sharp timbre. And in the end I could get no further than the fact that with Elisabeth Schumann there had been a continuity of tension in the subtle inflection of the line of vocal sound that had given heightening and exciting effect to the emerging phrase; and that with Streich there was not.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VERNON YOUNG

Kinds of Loving in the International Film

Exordium. When Alberto Moravia was asked, not long ago, if he believed that inter-sexual hostility, a prevailing subject of his own novels, was a consequence of the Capitalist condition, he answered: "I think it's a consequence of the *biological* condition!"

Throughout *A Kind of Loving,* one watches with delicate convulsions of horror the short potential love life of a young draftsman in a British Midlands factory town of singular hideousness: his courtship of an office girl with just enough veneer to seem glamorous until the shallow contents of her mind and the thrifty boundaries of her taste are revealed; his doubt that she is indeed worth the trouble of acquiring and his quitting of the field; his subsequent blotting of the doubt because she's sexually enticing—and how much local choice has he?; the predictable consequence and his outraged but dutiful marriage; the couple's mutual servitude, to each other's spite and to the girl's ghastly mother's house and lower-middle (class) pretensions; his galled exit from the "home" that isn't his, and his irresolute kick of autonomy before accepting the life sentence that will erase the enfeebled touch of decency which differentiates him from his mongrel fellows and extinguish the virility which has swiftly served its shabby ends. At fade-out he and his unwanted wife meet on a hill-top in full stupefying view of the brick-filled crater which does duty as a city of man, where they make a preposterous agreement to "try again."

"When two are stript, long ere the course begin/ We wish that one should lose, the other win—." After twenty minutes of playing time, I might not have declared, "Loved him, hated her!," but I rather knew which side I was on and what I wanted him to lose. Everything within his ken. Tempted by a friend who confessed to me that his only positive reaction during Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly* was to yell at the characters through his cupped hands, "Hey! *Get off that island!,*" I was moved by an equally remote form of altruism to command Mr. Alan Bates (actor's name), in a loud clear voice, to take to the hills. Since, when all reward is wanting, reconciliation is the abode of fools.

What the scope of director John Schlesinger's intention may have been, I don't know—it appears to have been modest—but he has obdurately restated a century-old pyrrhic victory of competent naturalism. The film cannot conceivably be edifying to such as those who are its dismal protagonists. For anyone else, except anthropologists, who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may well be counted on to show the liveliest disinterest, it is not an experience for prolonged moral or aesthetic contemplation. Schlesinger's handling of the milieu is what might be called sensitively neutral (like the way of a surgeon with a pancreas), dispassionate and unobtrusive: never an excited movement, never a falsification to make a prospect pleasing, never a word or a house-front that isn't garishly authentic—never more style than the absence of it in the subject dictates. The deadly patient accuracy with which he has exhumed every shopworn brutality of instinct and reproduced the excruciating syllables of a populace, totally without subject matter in its life, must itself be regarded as a kind of loving.

If I say that Europeans are frequently more coherent when translating the raw material of the American scene into movie substance, I don't expect the remark to be taken as a finality. But no domestic social-realism film I've yet seen, expressionist or naturalistic, has caught even a reverberation of the polyglot wonder discovered by François Reichenbach in his "documentary," *L'Amerique Insolite.* And *Something Wild,* directed by Jack Garfein (a Czechoslovak), is a case in point closer to my present subject.

The setting is one of those jungle boroughs north-east of Manhattan, if mercifully failing memory serves. Summertime in the Great Ooze: the appalling heat, the jagged tempo, the wide-open door, the wide-opened mouths—plugged ears and barricaded minds. A school-girl, 19, who has been raped and told no one, hugging her fear and revulsion like an animal in a cave. She is rescued from suicide by a big, silent auto mechanic, himself mutely alive between the oblivion of his work and the oblivion of dead-drunkenness. His protection of the girl becomes an imprisonment of her, while he gropes with what little eloquence he has to be saved by her in his turn. Thus they confront each other across an abyss, like two wilderness animals, making feral sounds. When, after a sketchily indicated passage of time, she relents and agrees to marry him, only then does she permit Mother, from whose indifference she has fled, to reenter the picture—a picture altered for life, which Mother can't bring herself to recognize or accept. Self-injured by the girl's disappearance and baffling alliance with a stranger, yet as fundamentally incurious as ever, the fatuous woman can only exclaim, "My baby!—my child!".

And this is the last good touch: the girl, strong in her new-found will, *is* nonetheless child, and before this belated comfort she melts. The man stands dumbly by, one hand holding that of his wife who is enclosed within the maternal embrace, shut out but docile before the incomprehensible world of woman. One is at liberty to envisage a future not unlike that of the couple in *A Kind of Loving,* wherein Mother will always be on hand to break the maleness of the muddled man, when a scapegoat is called for, by reminding him that he's not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good enough for her "baby girl." Yet, somehow (and the genuine, unmannered performances of Ralph Meeker and Carroll Baker have much to do with one's indecision) there are grounds for confidence in the decent survival of this odd union of derelicts. Without a verb between them, they do have unquelled instinct, whereas the brass-knocker fragment of culture inherited by the English couple is worse than none, giving them just enough articulation for vulgarity and a bleak eternity of loveless compromise.

Garfein's first film is not unfaulted: he establishes no cinematic rhythm, his incidental characters are as approximate as Hollywood's, and the anonymous montage which provides the living background swill breaks down into static fragments during the last half of the story. However, if his technique isn't safe from reproach, his integrity of meaning is. His lost man and girl are not trying to destroy each other on instructions from a sadistic script-writer (as in so many Hollywood-cum-Tennessee-Williams adaptations); they are trying to discover each other—with pathetically limited means. He keeps his eye on this irreducible germ of relationship, with no time out for anti-intellectualism (cf. *Shadows*), exploitation of sub-social hysteria (cf. *The Savage Eye*)—nor for an inventive contribution to the art of implied sexual intercourse. (I'd like to think that in this contest Jules Dassin's *Phaedra* has broken the last camel's-back in captivity.) Garfein's contribution to an abused genre is a welcome exception to the compulsive effort which seems to be the secretly punitive principle of British and American film realists, alike: to reverse Ben Jonson's admonition—"Beware thou, then, render men's figures truly and teach them no less to hate their deformities than to love their forms." Love of deformity, offered as a charitable interest in the depressed classes, may be a more compelling motive than film critics in the democracies have been able to perceive.

Back in 1958, Marcel Carne contrived an adroit facsimile of a high-speed American Juvenile-Delinquent film, *Les Tricheurs*. After exploiting every negotiable sensation of the fast set, from jive to abortion and death in a Jaguar, he added a ten-minute elegy to show that he was morally wounded by the spectacle. An idiotic film, so successful it impressed French financiers and is thus an important factor in the economic liberation of a production phase called The New Wave. Also it initiated an international epidemic of boring-Youth films, in which every character has been a local duplicate of the boys and girls in the Carne escapade. We have seen films from England, Sweden, Czechoslovakia and Poland strenuously attempting the French atmosphere as they conceive it to be, with no social actuality of their own which resembles it, and only imposed mannerisms to compensate for the lack of style.

Perhaps the most cryptic effort has been Andrez Wajda's *The Innocent Sorcerers*. The ingredients are familiar. Jaded young man (or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is it a pose?) meets promiscuous girl (or is she?). Both recognize they may be at the threshold of Real Love but neither will initiate the gesture or the phrases that will assure commitment. Afraid of a transitory affair at the Serious Moment, they affront each other instead, play games (strip poker in the Polish movie) and pretend cosmic indifference. Carne's film ended with violence and feeble casuistry; Wazda's, embarrassingly arch, on an inconclusive note. The pair have "respected" each other but still won't give; they separate again, perhaps temporarily, with a drawn question mark between them. To give this Eternal Recurrence any credence in its immediate variation demands a consistent treatment. In a sense, *Something Wild* is one, grim way of doing it, and the comic way has been exemplified with high charm by Doniol-Valcroze who played it as a blend of the fantastic and the sardonic. Poland hasn't the nucleus of urbanity for doing a styled job of this fable; the only hope was to keep it within plausible social bounds and be sure that the Two were indubitably male and female. But for some flamboyant reason the hero of the occasion is rather obviously a faggot, with a dyed-blond monk's-cut like Olivier's in *Hamlet;* he reeks with coy mannerisms and is at the same time a phenomenally capable extrovert who works hard at a medical lab half the day, spends much of the other half giving boxing lessons, takes a turn with friends in a jazz orchestra, evenings, and spends the night watch in a variety of beds.

Fluently directed and edited, but nonetheless a casualty, this film perversely illustrates the crucial problem for the Polish film-maker, having exhausted his Underground theme and forbidden by un-worded fiat to make any more films as unequivocally beyond the reach of Welfare-State conciliation as *Real End of the War, Last Day of Summer, Eighth Day of the Week* (only a pirated German print of the last-named reached foreign circulation, I think). These three dealt with deeper fatalities of men and women at the severance point. In the first, a woman helplessly watches her husband, reduced to near-imbecility by a war-camp experience, beg to be humanized by the love she has given someone else. While she hesitates, he hangs himself. In the second, two defeated individuals separately arrive at a deserted beach, where each has come to lick his respective life-wounds. They struggle, but fail, to resolve their undisclosed tragedies in each other's arms: the woman retreats again, the man stops trying, and both are swallowed by the ocean as three jet-planes, only other sign of life besides sand-beetles, re-appear for the last time, trailing their slip-streams, like comets of doom, across the blank heavens. In the third of these films a young man and girl needing, and pledged to, each other, literally don't have a *place* where they can make love or even satisfactorily embrace—not a room of their own or of anyone else's (and the crisis can't be seriously appreciated by citizens of a Mediterranean country or of California!). The girl finally meets an older man who *has* extra living space and suffi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cient charm to make the sharing of it a species of sexual blackmail. She abandons the younger man.

The Pole is a Romantic, given to vehement melancholy. He's a European; his history is loaded with betrayal. He's not yet prepared to make carefree socially constructive films without a self-conscious effort, nor to envisage a couple free of estrangement. *The Innocent Sorcerers* is an uncomfortable travesty of a nationally rooted skepticism.

Divorce—Italian Style comprises two dangerous jokes: the absurdity of Sicilian *mores* as viewed by an outsider (a mainland Italian is no less an outsider for being the most qualified observer) and the disposal, by violence, of a tedious wife. Since, in actuality, Sicily is as impossible to laugh off as murder (or a tedious wife), Pietro Germi's success on both counts is a dazzling *tour de force*. Germi has arrived at art by parodying his own derivative career. His first film, of early post-war vintage, was *I Nommi del Legge*, a sort of Sicilian "Western," and his next-to-latest was *I Maledetto Imbroglio*, a sort of Roman Chicagoan. In the years between, while concurrently acting, under his own direction very often, he had tried domestic realism with a touch of De Sica. All the while he must have been assimilating technical resources from every available direction in order to enrich the mode he next hoped to personalize. Farce may be the mode for Germi, the instrument best suited to his talent—not an inferior instrument, for how many notable farces have there been? *Divorce—Italian Style* is a film quickly bypassed on the one-way thoroughfare of intellectual opinion, yet it's a remarkably sophisticated product, not only where it meets the eye but also within the labyrinth of its blatant subject. Trick cutting, insolent music and contrapuntal monologue have been coordinated with a degree of artifice that makes them appear novel, and sundry merciless vignettes provoke you to identify the directorial signatures which are therein being forged (Clouzot, Franju and Mauro Bolognini are among the recognizable principals)—this is not a patchwork of other men's inspiration, it's an exploitation of their foibles.

Coincidentally suggestive for me, in line with Germi's malice-domestic pleasantry, was a Polish film I saw, shortly previous to my attendance at *Divorce—Italian Style*. Among other travellers on a night train was an escaping murderer, established as a monster (by the audience on the train, at any rate), precisely because the victim was his *wife*, and despite our knowing nothing at all about the wife and little more about the fugitive himself. With no pain of transition we tacitly applauded Baron Cefalu in the Italian comedy for the ingenuity he was exerting with exactly the same objective. Comedic license as against that of melodrama is not a demonstrable answer to the question—Why do we hope Cefalu will succeed? (And I think the Freudian deduction of our personal fantasies is needlessly indirect). I don't believe we could care less whether or not he weds his pretty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cousin—only a simpleton would share his neglect of the probability that she'd be as boring, given the 14 years he has spent with the Signora. (Germi enforces the probability with his parting shot.) At the point of our intersection with the household, we surely find the wife more personable by far—thanks to Daniele Roca: importunacy with a bland Mona Lisa smile, and mustache. No, it's my feeling that we're purer aesthetes than moralists believe; we respond to the *art* of the matter, the aesthetically patterned expectation. Impelled to identify ourselves with Baron Cefalu's momentum, we feel a kinetic need to fulfill it, just as we would *not* want to have it fulfilled had we been initially placed within the ambience of the Signora's sympathy.

While savoring the beauty of hard sunlight on decaying baroque, a parenthetical reminder came my way from *Il Bell'Antonio*. Bolognini's cool handling of Claudia Cardinale had given us a margin for doubting the felicity of which Antonio thought himself deprived. Two realities depicted—the romantic wooer, the bartering bride—without destroying the fragile balance of Antonio's conviction of personal tragedy: a subtle feat. I couldn't help suspecting that *Divorce—Italian Style* might be construed as a wry speculation, farcically treated, on what would have transpired if Antonio had regained his potency and kept his Cardinale. The insinuation is made doubly plausible by the choice of Antonio-Mastroianni as Cefalu and by the inversion of a Sicilian imperative featured in the earlier film: the Cefalus have been married for years, have no children; yet they're not pariahs, from the community viewpoint! With no reference to the matter in the film, we must assume that Germi has artfully kept one of his loudest jokes implicit.

The human face and the humanized setting—comic or in disrepair —are the persistent irreducibles of Italian film. When Germi's resources of montage and decor have been itemized, the abundant spirit of *Divorce—Italian Style* hasn't been located without a special declaration for the actors who exalt the absurdities. Mastroianni's personification of the Baron is a masterly vindication of his release from playing himself so often, mood-indigo, intellectual: the pomaded ruffian instead, his coiffure the crown of a wax-dummy containment of personality; the rigidly respectable stance which to alien eyes is ground itself, of outlandish eccentricity; the puppy awkwardness when he swings into action, unseen by public eye; the vendetta twitch of the cheek muscle. And besides Mastroianni and Daniele Roca there's Leopoldo Trieste, a fastidious clown, giving his graceful best since his role in Fellini's *The White Sheik:* the painter-suitor of Cefalu's wife—the gist of the man his shy but unruffled conviction of his irresistible personal splendor—a figure distilled from ages of photo albums and provincial theatre companies.

Three performers also have pride of place in François Truffaut's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jules et Jim, but they are too interdependent with the film to be thought of as exalting it: Jeanne Moreau, Henri Serre, Oskar Werner. Of the three, seen as characters, I'd like a whole film made about Jules, as Oskar Werner creates him in context: reticent, warm, smiling at ill usage. To summarize is to flounder; and to settle for less. To say that *Jules et Jim* is the story of a love maintained between three people over twenty years, maintained in the face of Catherine's marriage to Jules and when, even so, she has Jim as a lover, and Jim keeps Jules as a friend—to say this is a necessary minimum for conveying the "idea" at all. Having said it, one hesitates before the mystifying inferences which a reader, not having seen the film, would be likely to gather. For *Jules et Jim* is neither romance nor morality nor pure farce nor psychological epitome, yet it touches and sometimes invades each of these territories. "Like Life," one is too easily tempted to conclude; the very conclusion can only be drawn by adopting what seems to be the most embracing inference of the film, *viewed as a story.* "Life" has no such tone—life has no tone at all until endowed with someone's imposed vision of it. "Be careful how you interpret life," Erich Heller has advised,—"it is that way." Relative to the observer, we have learned: relative to the observer's constitution, his experience, his cultural presuppositions. *Jules et Jim* is an essay in moral relativism *only* if you are content with restricting the film to its *events,* to the separable subject: which is to miss most of the art and therefore be unable to account for the events; they are given their character from the tone permeating them.

Truffaut, taken too literally at his interviewed word, has impressed critics and young film-makers with his ready invention. Since he admits being ever willing to invite and incorporate inspirations of the moment, when shooting, his films are chiefly regarded as an art of extemporization; this is to honor them more in the breach than in the observance. There's no such thing as an extemporized *art:* there is an unplanned opportunity, instantaneously sorted and judged for its aptness by a controlling sensibility—call it intellectual selection, intuitively governed. Truffaut probably can't himself explain, because he takes as given, the secret of his charm, defined by other film-makers who have need of it (in England, the U. S., Poland, it may be) as "spontaneity." What they overlook—I resume my reference to *Jules et Jim*—is Truffaut's pre-meditated devotion to subject! In 1953 Truffaut read the novel (the first by a 74-year-old man, Henri-Pierre Roché), promised himself that if he made film he'd make one of this book, made three other films before fulfilling the promise, wherewith he sought to re-evoke the tone of *The 400 Blows:* tragic-comic (i.e., "triste dans sa ligne, mais drôle dans ses details"), in the service of a more panoramic subject.

To compose an epic by lyric means was virtually the demand he made on himself and on the rhetoric of film art; to tell an unlikely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

story of two men and a woman who must appeal to us, singly and by situation, to move the three through time and place so that the one dimension is felt (protracted yet evanescent), the other experienced by sight and hearing, without unduly subordinating the three and without wholly extricating them from the multiple phenomena which illuminate their value and reduce their importance. With Jean Gruault as associated adapter, he made a whimsical masterpiece, seen at middle distance, an exercise in nostalgia assured by "fixing" the action in only-yesterday, 1907-1927. This is a curiously volatile creation: the essence evaporates a few hours after you receive it, yet mind-hovers thereafter like those passages of life which drop away, entire, and when recalled make you wonder if they indeed took place and, if so, why then you *cared* so much—or so little—and isn't it all a heart-catching fraud, anyway? I'm not convinced that Truffaut's literary-historical obligation required *as many* figures of movie speech as he utilized: the meteoric cutting-speed at the opening, simulation of silent-film tableaux and grainy print, the shut-down to a still, inserted documentary, overlaps, film-within-a-film—certainly I could have done without the narrative voice—but I'll concede his intrepidity.

And his insouciance—at a special point of stress. I'm puzzled by Truffaut's hope that he has filmed "a hymn to love, perhaps even a hymn to life." The jubilant description all but disarmed me; it puts at discount my perhaps over-sensitive disturbance, set up by watching the rapid transit of two high-minded men through a twilight world, in thrall to a woman who appears to constitute the exclusive focus of their lives, a woman who, in any translation one reaches for, is a Medusa wearing the mask of virtue. Catherine is histrionically amusing, flexible and devoted, so long as both men agree to worship her not wisely but too well and without question, agree not to see through her—not to see *into* her: when one or the other abdicates, for an hour or a day, she strikes to wound—ultimately, to kill. In point of fact she destroys them both, and if the Mack Sennett manner in which she literally destroys the more independent one is stylistically part and parcel of Truffaut's evocation by comedy it's nonetheless, to my taste, a bizzare "Amen" for a hymn to love and life.

Envoi. A cartoonist, Gahlin—sole Swedish humorist I've ever been moved to quote—has supplied me with the thought that best concentrates my reaction to this aspect of Truffaut's triangle. "Why should I try to understand women? Women understand them—and they don't like them."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN WAIN

London Letter

THERE IS NO BLINKING IT: the issue that faces British opinion most squarely, and all sections of it, this winter, is the confrontation of Continental Europe. Americans, accustomed to their vast distances, have to make an imaginative effort to understand how the small countries of Europe continue century after century to cherish the superheated sense of identity and difference that breeds customs barriers, tariffs, wars and all the rest of it. From one point of view it is absurd, though the first stone ought probably not to be cast from a nation whose Southern and Northern halves, with a common language, a common political inheritance, and many common problems, were at each other's throats less than a century ago. Humanity *is* ridiculous, in these matters, and homogenization is never achieved without prolonged agonies of one kind and another. The homogenization of the Soviet Union, for instance, was only pushed through by repeated acts of savagery, in the face of desperate resistance. Even within the British Isles, there are problems connected with the national and racial identity of Wales and Scotland which can only be handled by tact and sometimes call for more than tact; and we have been able to do nothing better with Ireland than to partition it. (How the Soviets must despise us!) Meanwhile, Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Nationalist party, operates its pirate radio station; Mr. C. M. Grieve, under his pen-name of Hugh MacDiarmid, declares that Scotland is the milch-cow of English imperialism; Brendan Behan tells us all about Ireland from the point of view of a Catholic ex-I.R.A. agitator—and the United Kingdom, perhaps ironically so called, drifts nearer and nearer to Europe.

It can't be stopped, of course. Homogenization has finally caught up with Europe; Frenchmen and Italians, Dutch and Germans, will have to stop pretending to be different. But what if they *are* different? Never mind, they must stop all the same. The jig's up. After all, the tourist boards and the various "cultural" agencies will see to it that colourful national dress is permitted on state occasions, native languages will be permitted so long as they don't get in the way, and peasant dances will be encouraged on Sunday afternoons. There are ups and downs here. The Welsh are allowed to conduct their school education in Welsh and refuse to employ a teacher who can only teach in English; the Bretons, by contrast, are forbidden the use of their language for any official purpose, and if any teacher is sentimental enough to want to teach the language to children, he is allowed to keep them in school for an extra hour a week (or is it half an hour? I forget) for that purpose. Everywhere a chaos of policies, nowhere a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

firm movement towards centralization. Yet centralization is coming.

The other evening I went to a party arranged by the German Embassy, "to meet" Günter Grass, whose colossal ribald novel *The Tin Drum* has been beating up a tin storm, or perhaps even a real one, in our literary circles. The book is vivid and memorable enough to attract attention at any time, but one feels that the slightly flustered reaction it has aroused here is partly a result of the historical moment at which we find ourselves. After all, it was one thing in the past for cultivated amateurs to be knowledgeable about Continental literature, but from now on we are going to have to *live* with these foreign madmen. Baudelaire could reach us as an Awful Warning, Apollinaire and Cocteau as enjoyable mountebanks who ran massage-parlours for the arts, toning up their tired old faces; Mann and Gide could be rather terrible, very famous old uncles who fortunately lived too far away to invite. But now? Our business men fly backwards and forwards like mallard, and *foreign languages* they need yet! A man like Grass is positively breathing down one's neck, and very gamey it is too, with his mad drum-playing dwarf and his gigantesque jokes in bad taste about Hitler and all that.

And here am I, as soon as I have finished this article, about to hurry off to Paris, where I shall be given the Grass treatment by my French publisher. It never used to be done, but it is now. We're all going to be translated much more, and more people are going to read the translations. Already there is hardly room on the Continent of Europe for all the crowded, elbowing nations, and now that they have begun to roll themselves into one enormous nation, overshadowing both the other two "power blocs" (let's make no mistake about that), the feeling in England is that if we don't get in and co-operate we shall simply be buried. There are Little Englanders, of the right and the left, who want to stay out, and there are people like myself who instinctively distrust homogenization, but the fact is that the hour struck fifty years ago and it is only by fantastic achievements in the highly-developed British art of procrastination that we have refused to admit it till now. Because, of course, we heard it plainly enough. We heard it when British and German firms were jockeying for bulk orders in the "underdeveloped countries" before 1914. We heard it when Blériot flew the Channel. We heard it when Eliot, fresh from Heidelberg and Paris, wrote *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Homogenize or die! And the decision before the British intelligentsia is what it always has been. To be cosy and provincial or to compete. I think they'll compete. Meanwhile, it's depressing to see that public statements on the theme of European union get more publicity in proportion to their silliness. Say something to the point and you won't be heard. But scream, as John Osborne has just screamed, and everybody will know you're there.

The position as regards literature and art is complicated, of course, by the Americanization of all European culture. It's as if everybody

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in Western Europe had decided to amalgamate ahead of time by getting with America. Usually (I need hardly say) with the things that Americans, for the most part, feel least flattered about. The poetry-and-jazz vogue, for instance. I notice Jacques Barzun has pointed out that revolutionary Romanticism has reached its final stage in the anti-art fad; beyond that lies nothing but disintegration. I agree. The kind of thing that gets chanted against a jazz background, in the mushrooming clubs devoted to this sort of thing in London, couldn't fall apart any more without ceasing to be language at all, never mind poetry. But then the new, homogenized, multi-lingual society will probably not put much stress on language. It will use visual media for entertainment and suggestion, currency as its life-blood, and political antagonisms as its adrenalin. What more could we want? And what more, anyway, are we going to get?

***Notes on Contributors** (cont.)*

A collection of essays by BENJAMIN DE MOTT has recently been published by Basic Books.

JOHN SIMON's forthcoming collection of essays, entitled *Acid Test,* will be published this Spring by Stein and Day.

B. H. HAGGIN and VERNON YOUNG write regularly on music and film for THE HUDSON REVIEW.

JOHN WAIN's most recent book is a novel, *Strike the Father Dead.*

PATRICK CRUTTWELL's next contribution to this magazine will be a review of W. H. Auden's *The Dyer's Hand.*

PAUL LEVINE has recently returned from Denmark where he was on an American-Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship. He now lives in Boston.

ROGER SALE teaches English at the University of Washington.

CECIL HEMLEY is president of the Poetry Society of America.

GERALD WEALES teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *American Drama Since World War II.*

VIVIAN MERCIER's new book, *The Irish Comic Tradition,* is soon to be published by Oxford.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT's "A Defense of Fiction" will appear in the next issue of this Review.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reviews

PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Fiction Chronicle

As I WRITE THIS IN ENGLAND, the English papers are full of what is happening in Oxford. Oxford, I should say, Mississippi: the admission of Meredith to college. And I have noticed that there is one name which virtually every reporter or commentator, in the literate journals anyway, feels obliged to invoke. He invokes it to explain, to justify, to suggest parallels. Here, he says, is someone who knew about this, analysed it, documented it, and can help you to understand why these people are behaving as they are. The name is Faulkner.

A novelist: not a historian, sociologist, psychologist or theologian, but a novelist. A self-confessed maker of fictions—and it is he who is called on to help us who live in another country to understand a situation which is very far from fiction. It occurred to me then: how much of what we feel and imagine and believe we know about societies other than our own is derived from what on the face of it ought to be the most unreliable of sources—these partial, subjective inventions of the unrepresentative and unpredictable creatures called novelists. The picture of America that the world has accepted has been very considerably the creation of America's novelists (not always the best of them): first Cooper, I suppose, then Harriet Beecher Stowe and Twain, later Jack London and Sinclair Lewis, Steinbeck and Fitzgerald. There have always been fifty readers for the novelists to every one for de Tocqueville or Parkman or Adams, and a hundred for every one with actual knowledge of the country. The fiction-makers have conveyed the image: have they also invented it—or have they told the truth? Simple readers take the fiction for fact: hence the triumph of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as propaganda for a cause, and hence the vogue of Jack London in Moscow. The more sophisticated may delude themselves the opposite way: over-determined not to be deceived, they refuse to see it when the fact is really identical with the fiction. Such readers are in no great danger of swallowing the simple perversions of simple writers, such as Beecher Stowe and London—writers who operate on the surface of life with primary colours and crude materials; but they may be taken in by the subtle, who present an image rather of character than of event. Take the American of Henry James, that basic theme on which he plays his variations all the way from Christopher Newman through Isobel Archer to Milly Theale: the true-hearted, high-principled innocent who is fascinated, bewildered and finally destroyed by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the subtleties of wicked old Europe. It is most convicing in James; but I must admit that I have always doubted if anything like it ever existed in fact. Was Europe ever quite so clever? was America ever quite so dumb? But truth or not, this was a very powerful image of the American. It reigned for a long time; in a book like Saul Bellow's *Henderson,* I suspect that it reigns still, and in one of the novels now to be reviewed, I feel its traces are detectable. It is no longer, though, the dominant fiction-image of the American. We are well on the way, indeed, to the roles' being reversed. In proof of which, take these—all from this chronicle's assignment of fiction:

1. "I'll go away," thought Josée suddenly. "I must get that firmly into my head. I'll go away. He can do whatever he likes, commit suicide if he must; he's talked about it often enough. That phony psychiatrist of his has talked about it often enough too. So has his mother. All right, let him kill himself. Let him go mad like his wretched father. Let them all get on with their stupid alcoholic lives. *Vive la France* and Benjamin Constant!"

2. "I suppose that's what you'd call being a square, but I'm damned if I see how a man can have a healthy attitude to sex if he can't talk about anything but butts and babies being stacked or packed and so on and so on. No wonder the bloody Americans are all in trouble about their bloody sex-lives."

3. "Hope? No, I don't think there's any hope. We're too empty here" —her eyes took in the Sunday crowd—"too empty—here." She touched her heart. "This isn't a country at all, it's a collection of football players and Eagle Scouts. Cowards. We think we're happy. We're not. We're doomed."

4. I shouted at him: "Like all Americans, you've got mother-trouble. You're fixed on me for your mother . . . I'm bored with the whole thing. . . ."

5. "Are they so uncertain?" I enquired.
"We all are," Peter replied.
"Not Rinaldo." He was just approaching us then.
"Nor you neither," the boy said, turning his head away with a half-laugh, "you damned Europeans."

6. One morning when she had got up early to see the dawn, he gave a scream of genuine anguish that made her rush to him. They stared at each other without a word and she got back into bed.
"You're not a man," she said.
" 'To be a man' . . . what does that mean? If it means being brave, I'm brave. Virile too. And selfish."
"A man should be able to live without constantly needing someone with him, his mother or his wife."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These passages come from one French, one American, and two English novelists; yet even if the word "American" occurred in none of them, would anyone doubt for a moment what country, what people were being talked of? No reader of current fiction would, I feel sure of that. There he is, one of the American egghead-stereotypes of the 1960's: miserably unsure of himself and his country (5) or blackly despairing of both (3), destructive, alcoholic, tottering forever between his head-shrinker and his mum (1, 2, 4 and 6). An American reader must recognise him with wry resignation—"here we go again"—just as an English reader will recognise the equivalent stereotype for *his* people: chilly, awkward, and (probably) latently homosexual. And in passages 1 and 5, it is surely ironic to see how the James stereotype has been completely reversed. It is Europe, here, that stands up for the simple clarity of common sense; the American is the complex, intricate, uncertain. Is this the truth now, the price which has had to be paid for becoming full-grown, for turning into that dubiously agreeable thing a World Power, for acquiring achievement and prestige in the arts, for rendering obsolete, in short, what Henry Adams wrote in the *Education:* "All one's life one had seen the American spiritually on his knees to Europe . . ."? Or is it an invention of a crackpot intelligentsia, projecting on to a whole community their own failings and failures? I have some suspicions that that is what it is. But inventions can make reality follow them: one reason why inventions are important. . . .

It is time to turn to the novels[1] which have given rise to these reflections. Here we have American writers on Americans; French and English on themselves and on Americans; Germans on Germans; a West Indian of Hindu origin on his own people; a Yiddish-writing American on Jews in 17th-century Poland; and an Argentinian man of letters (scarcely a novelist) who seems about the only genuine internationalist of them all. Let me take this first—Jorge Luis Borges' *Labyrinths*—because he is completely unlike all the others and the mode of his unlikeness is not without interest. *Labyrinths* consists of a large number of short pieces, of which the most individual are those which inhabit a strange no man's land between essay and story, literary fantasy and real life. It is often not at all clear which dimension we are in, or even if the source of the literary fantasy is an actual book or

[1] LABYRINTHS, by *Jorge Luis Borges*. New Directions. $5.50. A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS, by *V. S. Naipaul*. McGraw-Hill. $5.95. THE WONDERFUL CLOUDS, by *Françoise Sagan*. Dutton. $3.00. THE FURNISHED ROOM, by *Laura Del-Rivo*. Doubleday. $3.95. NIGHT AND HOPE, by *Arnost Lustig*. Dutton. $3.95. BILLIARDS AT HALF-PAST NINE, by *Heinrich Böll*. McGraw-Hill. $4.95. THE SINS OF THE FATHERS, by *Christian Geissler*. Random House. $3.95. THE SLAVE, by *I. B. Singer*. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $4.95. A FAMILY'S AFFAIRS, by *Ellen Douglas*. Houghton Mifflin. $5.95. PORTRAIT IN BROWNSTONE, by *Louis Auchincloss*. Houghton Mifflin. $4.95. NOW BLESS THYSELF, by *Elizabeth Sewell*. Doubleday. $3.95. THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK, by *Doris Lessing*. Simon & Schuster. $5.95. ANOTHER COUNTRY, by *James Baldwin*. Dial Press. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

writer or itself a fantasy. Thus the French author Pierre Menard, who in the 20th century "recreated" *Don Quixote,* is a complete fake—I think—but the Longobardian warrior Droctulft of the 6th century A.D., who changed sides and fought for the Romans against his own tribe, does really occur in Gibbon, chapter XLV, just as Borges says he does. In this story, the barbarian who turned Roman reminds Borges of a story told him by his grandmother, of a 19th-century Englishwoman who became a member of a primitive Indian tribe. These two are juxtaposed, across 1300 years and half a world and possibly the gulf between history and fiction (for Borges may have invented his grandmother's anecdote)—and this seems the characteristic flavour of Borges' writing. He has an imagination bizarre and artificial, often whimsical, but genuinely original. Above all, he is literary, bookish, not afraid to be, and to show himself as being, immensely and variously erudite. The result—in an age when most writers of fiction seem to aim at presenting themselves as not in the least more cultured than their characters—the result I found refreshing. Also refreshing was an air of interest, enjoyment; in a word, of curiosity. Borges, at least, seems neither tired of life nor disgusted by it.

Neither does V. S. Naipaul, whose *House for Mr. Biswas* explores the lives of the Hindus of Trinidad in the West Indies. This is a crowded, rambling chronicle of that pullulating organism the Hindu United Family (the H.U.F. was, and doubtless still is, a legal entity in Indian law), held together only by the personality of Mr. Biswas, a pathetic little man, at times a reporter, at other times a sign-painter, a failure at all times. The book has a gentle, tolerant, slightly monotonous charm; individual characters are rather submerged in the general flood, and nothing of great profundity or poignancy is said about life: but though you will not be deeply moved by *Mr. Biswas,* you will, I think, be interested and amused.

Cross the Atlantic for France and England, as seen in Françoise Sagan's *The Wonderful Clouds* (though that has scenes in Florida too) and Laura Del-Rivo's *The Furnished Room.* Of Sagan I seem to have a better opinion than is current among the best (egghead) people; she does have, I agree, a brittle little chatterbox of a mind, but it chatters with point at times, and it chatters in a dry laconic French which gives her some right to invoke (as her heroine does in the first of my quotations above) the name of Benjamin Constant. *The Wonderful Clouds* is very inferior Sagan; for one thing, it includes one or two characters from earlier books, and they give every sign of being aware that their true tenure of life came to an end some time ago. The basic French arrogance ("we, of course, are the only really intelligent, really civilized, really expert in bed, people in the world") comes out more nakedly than usual as Josée the French heroine dissects Alan, her hysterical American husband; and this will enrage all who cannot see it as funny. Still, put Sagan beside Del-Rivo's *The Furnished Room,* and you feel

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there may be something in that arrogance after all; for it is the amateurishness and the pathetic naiveté which strike one by contrast. Sagan's people are really just as futile as Del-Rivo's (both books deal with a deracinated intelligentsia), but they do have an air of living at the centre, in a metropolis; Del-Rivo's, though they live in London, seem incurably provincial. Largely a matter of self-confidence—also of money. *The Furnished Room,* though, has one point of interest: its pseudo-Nietszchean, crypto-Fascist hero who gets himself involved in crime. There is something there; but hardly enough for a book.

Over the English Channel now, and into the awful bog of gloom and remorse which is (or seems to be) contemporary German literature. West Germany must be an odd country (let me admit I have never been there), for if travellers' tales and novelists' insights are true, it must combine an immense, bouncing, self-delighted prosperity with a hideous and gnawing guilt—guilt for the ghosts of Auschwitz. Both these German novels—Heinrich Böll's *Billiards at Half-past Nine* and Christian Geissler's *The Sins of the Fathers*—are concerned with that dreadful haunting. The former is the more complex, elaborate, carefully articulated; the latter, perhaps because it is a simpler piece of fictional propaganda, struck me as the more effective. It certainly hits hard—as hard, in its way, as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (the comparison is not meant as completely insulting, for I agree with Edmund Wilson that that book has been too easily despised)—and yet there is a third work here, which deals with the same tragedy more indirectly, in a manner less overtly indignant, but to my mind more movingly. This is Arnost Lustig's *Night and Hope*. Lustig is a Czech; he lived as a boy in the ghetto-town which was, in effect, a staging-post on the way to the gas-chambers, and his book consists of seven stories about the Jews in that town. They are not, in themselves, particularly distinguished stories; where they score over the German novels is in their individual humanity. They do not theorise or denounce, they do not deal in embodiments of ideas, projections of a tribal guilt; they show these commonplace, unique individuals, living in extraordinary circumstances lives as ordinary as they can, on their way to be liquidated.

From Jews persecuted by 20th-century Germans to Jews persecuted by 17th-century Poles and Cossacks in Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave*. The comparison is not to the credit of the 20th century; for in Singer's book one finds an open-air lustiness, a Breughelish vitality which covers persecuted and persecutors alike. These people were limitlessly cruel, but at least they were all peasants living on the same earth; they did not desire to exterminate or plan a "Final Solution" with abstract scientific efficiency. Singer's novel is very readable, though I did not feel it justified its (or its blurb's) "epic" pretensions. This might be a matter of language; the original Yiddish may have dignified, hieratic overtones which the rather ordinary English of the translation does not have.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back home again—home for you, dear readers—with a couple of large solid chronicles of American family life: Ellen Douglas' *A Family's Affairs* and Louis Auchincloss' *Portrait in Brownstone*. The former is a tremendously feminine business. One is plunged into a vast frou-frou of petticoats as one follows the fortunes of Kate Anderson and her daughters and grand-daughters way down in Mississippi; for this is very much an Old South beaux-and-belles book, with much to-do about ancestors and family traditions and all that. Miss Douglas keeps the party clean ("she renounces," as her publishers put it, "wallowing in the abnormal"), but she does not sentimentalise; the matriarch at the end doesn't turn into a sweet old dear but into a selfish and querulous so-and-so. Miss Douglas' story flows along shallowly, unexcitingly, but not untruthfully—though no one, I fancy, will invoke *her* name to explain what is happening in Oxford. As for *Portrait in Brownstone,* one may say that this is good standard Auchincloss. It moves in that well-heeled world of New York lawyers and financiers which is his particular hunting-ground—the world of Edith Wharton, I suppose, two or three generations later—and part of the satisfaction which it gives comes from the confidence it instils. This writer, you feel, really *knows* the people he writes about. Knows them, gets on well with them, but is quite independent enough to judge them: indeed, the picture he draws of intricate networks of selfishness and domination, deceptions and self-deceptions, is rather horrifying. It reminds me of early Galsworthy—not a comparison which will be taken nowadays as a compliment, but in fact Galsworthy before he went soggy, the Galsworthy of *The Man of Property* and *In Chancery,* was a much better novelist than his present obscurity would suggest.

Still in America, but America viewed with an English eye, is Elizabeth Sewell's *Now Bless Thyself.* This is a campus novel: I suppose there are enough of them by now to constitute a genre. There are two campuses here, a secular State university and a Roman Catholic college, and there is a good deal of rather too obvious symbolism about a bridge over a motorway, which connects the two and which has a gate and a key. The whole book, indeed, is written from the standpoint of a devout Catholic convert, and I, poor outsider, found the spiritual cosiness just a little hard to take. But it's an intelligent book for all that, full of perceptions acute and feminine, full (for me) of the kind of pleasure which arises from recognition and agreement—"that's just what *I* felt! *I* noticed that too!" Not a novel, really: rather a report on experience, thinly disguised as a novel. The characters don't become more than mouthpieces; too many themes are started and scarcely developed; and episodes of crude violence at beginning and end jar badly with the rest. But these flaws do not hide what this is: a book written by a civilised and educated person for the pleasure and instruction of civilised and educated readers.

How odd, when one thinks of it, that this should have to be said!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And how odder that I find myself quite unable to say it of the two novels I have kept for the end of my chronicle, though these are books which will receive—have already received—far more attention and praise and excited discussion of their importance! Yet both of them—Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and James Baldwin's *Another Country*—seem to me genuinely harmful books, degraded and degrading, and the former an appallingly tedious one too. But they are not, unhappily, negligible; they are the work of writers with real talent and power, and both their natures and the receptions they have had are ominously significant. Significant of what? I am afraid this will sound pretentious, if not pharisaical: but significant, I would say, of a degeneracy, a mental collapse if it is not halted, in the civilisation of the West.

The two novels have some things in common. First is a virtually total obsession with sex. The frightening thing here is that the obsession has, as it were, spread out all over, far beyond sex itself. *The Golden Notebook*'s main theme—reiterated ad nauseam through its 560 pages—is that of being a "free woman" in the mid-20th century. And "being a free woman" is thought of entirely in terms of sex. Like this:

> Ella says drily: "My dear Julia, we've chosen to be free women, and This is the price we pay, that's all."
>
> "Free," says Julia. "Free! What's the use of being free if they (men) aren't? I swear to God, that every one of them, even the best of them, have the old idea of good women and bad women."
>
> "And what about us? Free, we say, yet the truth is they get erections when they're with a woman they don't give a damn about, but we don't have an orgasm unless we love him. What's free about that?"

A secondary theme is political; the book is written by and centred round an ex-Communist, and there is a good deal of predictable stuff about that, but *this* is what it really believes in, this is what the author and all her characters are really concerned with:

> Now he drops his self-parody and says with great seriousness: "My dear Ella, don't you know what the great revolution of our time is? The Russian revolution, the Chinese revolution—they're nothing at all. The real revolution is, women against men."

In *Another Country* the main theme is racialism, black against white. And this is how that is presented:

> Somewhere in his heart the black boy hated the white boy because he was white. Somewhere in his heart Vivaldo had feared and hated Rufus because he was black. They had balled chicks together, once or twice the same chick—why? And what had it done to them?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm black too, and I know how white people treat black boys and girls. They think you're something for them to wipe their pricks on."

In both novels, the sexual obsession has the effect of a disastrous narrowing of interest. People are reduced to virtually nothing but their sexual behaviours, and even these to particular aspects of them. In *The Golden Notebook,* the men are reduced to so many failures to satisfy the free women. In *Another Country,* men and women alike are brought down to two things only: the pigmentation of their skins and the performances of their sexual organs. Inevitably, a dreadful mindlessness descends on them: more obvious in *Another Country* than in *The Golden Notebook,* for in the latter there is a good deal of New Statesmanish cerebration and some flashes of shrewdness, but in the former it is quite extraordinary how a cast of characters which includes two writers, two musicians, and one highbrow actor, scarcely express one thought about their arts among the lot of them. Behind both books seems to lie this unspoken, perhaps unrealised assumption: "Sex is the only thing that really matters. Art and politics are interesting games. You can get very absorbed in them, very excited by them, kid yourself for a time that they really count. But they don't. Only sex counts."

Another thing they have in common is the theme of anti-success. In *Another Country* we have a not unfamiliar situation—the man who is about to become a Success. His novel (he is a writer) is on the way to the full treatment; the agents and TV tycoons and the rest are on to him. And he is—he just *has* to be—a bad writer, and everyone (himself included) is aware of it. And the price of success is self-contempt and the ruin of his marriage. He is contrasted with a writer who is completely *un*successful but is a "real writer." The latter lives a life of messy chaotic debauchery, whereas the successful-bad writer works hard and supports a family. This is surely nothing more than the old romantic genius-in-the-garret nonsense; but it is clearly intended to be more—it is intended to be a protest against the whole scale of values of Western success. Similarly, though less stridently, in *The Golden Notebook:* in which the figure of success is a business tycoon caricatured to a point of total incredibility. Well, no one will deny that success has its dangers, and I hope sincerely that those successful writers Mrs. Lessing and Mr. Baldwin will escape them. But these protests are not in the name of anything positive. They are not setting a true value against a false; they seem the protests of envy and impotence rather than of real anger. For the people of *The Golden Notebook,* there had once been a counter-value—Communism. That lost, they have nothing. The people of *Another Country* had always had—nothing.

In both, there is what seems a total despair about the civilisation which their authors and characters live in. This is far more savage and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

explicit in *Another Country,* which at times hits a note of real hysteria in its denouncings of America. "Some days, honey, I wish I could turn myself into one big fist and grind this miserable country into powder. Some days, I don't believe it has a right to exist." Racialism is the point of attack—and certainly I don't suppose that it is always agreeable to be a black man in a white man's country; but the attacks here are so wild and shrill, the picture of a perpetual state of race-sex tension is so extreme (if it were true, the streets of America would be permanently running in blood and every lamp-post would have its pendent corpse), that I find it impossible to resist the conclusion that what we have here is simply the extension of a hysteria which is really personal. *The Golden Notebook* is much milder in its picture of England, as befits a milder country; but it too is a repudiation of its society. It ends ironically with the main characters coming to terms—or saying they are going to: but this, which common sense might say is the best thing they could do and maybe now they'll stop being miserably and tediously promiscuous and start being useful for a change—this the book presents as defeat.

And *why* these denunciations and repudiations? What are these books saying is wrong with our societies? The answer would have greatly surprised the Western radicals of the past; it would surprise even more, perhaps, the Communists of Moscow. The answer is: because people are unhappy in bed. Here is another unspoken assumption, and it goes like this: "There is some connection between a society as a whole and the sex-lives of the individuals who live in it. A society can be judged—should be judged—by the quality of its sex." That, of course, is one of the basic dogmas of the contemporary enlightened—has been so, I suppose, since Freud and Lawrence: but was there ever an assumption less proven and less provable? The criterion is so incurably subjective, so inevitably a generalisation from individual experience. But it is always being used. "Bloody Englishwomen, no good in bed!" snarls *The Golden Notebook*'s hysterical American lover, and his "bloody Englishwoman" comes back with: "No wonder the bloody Americans are all in trouble about their bloody sex-lives." It can't be just two people in bed. It has to be Britain and America in bed. And as for *Another Country,* the book is just one long ugly hysterical chronicle of sex-miseries which are blamed on American society. It is significant that the only affair in which there is a gleam of hope, a flicker of tenderness, is an affair which is homosexual and partly un-American, since it is between an American actor and a French youth and is consummated in Paris. But this gleam of hope is the least convincing thing in the whole book; it is grossly sentimentalised, and its unreality is only emphasized by the fact that the French youth, whose dialogue is peppered by the author with bits in his native tongue, talks a French so full of elementary clangers that it would hardly earn a sophomore a C grade.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not long ago there was a Conference of Writers as part of the Edinburgh Festival. Some delegates were supposed to be coming from behind the Iron Curtain. They didn't come: and a good thing for the cause of the West that they didn't. For the conference turned very largely into a parade of exhibitionism. One writer announced that he was a homosexual, another that he was a drug-addict. Mary McCarthy —and quite right too—was moved to protest, and so was Rebecca West. I suspect that what they protested against there was what I have been protesting against here: the degradation of literature, exhibitionism pretending to be art.

PAUL LEVINE

The Season's Difference[1]

REVIEWERS, LIKE THE ENGLISH, take their pleasures sadly. If they are given *Breakfast at Tiffany's* they want *Doctor Faustus;* when presented with *Cain's Book* they pine after *Pickwick Papers;* offered *Hard Candy* they will accept nothing but *Cakes and Ale.* The season presents the usual mixed bag of good and bad novels but what marks the season's difference is the variety of experience it offers. We have Jewish intellectuals in New York; saintly beatniks in California; Catholic clerics in Minnesota; innocent voyagers in Greece; and the infantry on Guadalcanal.

Consider, for instance, Monroe Engel's *Voyager Belsky* and Jack Kerouac's *Big Sur.* One is by a professor at Harvard, the other by a beatnik from Columbia; yet both tell the same story of a man's crack-up, his lonely convalescence, and his final recovery. But whereas Kerouac's hero lights out for the isolation of Big Sur, Engel's man ends up on a remote island off the coast of Maine. Engel's novel is sober, thoughtful, and utterly artificial; Kerouac's is giddy, thoughtless, and utterly artificial.

Francesco Belsky, the unsettled thirty-year-old son of wealthy and permissive Jewish parents, is the hero of Mr. Engel's third novel. In order to "see once more whether the world has anything to say to him," Belsky makes aimless "voyages" away from an aimless urban existence clouded further by the memory of a wartime incident in which he and his best friend were unwittingly responsible for another soldier's death.

1 VOYAGER BELSKY, by *Monroe Engel.* Atheneum. $5.00. BIG SUR, by *Jack Kerouac.* Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $4.50. WHAT A WAY TO GO, by *Wright Morris.* Atheneum. $5.00. MORTE D'URBAN, by *J. F. Powers.* Doubleday. $4.50. THE THIN RED LINE, by *James Jones.* Scribner's. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This shared burden of guilt threatens to destroy their friendship, his friend's domestic life, and Belsky's recent marriage to his friend's sister. When the situation reaches the breaking-point, Belsky leaves the city on the last of his "voyages," ending up on the remote Maine coast where he spends a bleakly symbolic winter thinking things out. In these secluded surroundings, free from civilized distractions, Belsky's past and future catch up with him through his contact with an ancient housekeeper, an alcoholic employer, and a dying paramour. In his relationships with these three people—one sick and two dying—he comes to terms with the essence of hopelessness, the capabilities of *caritas,* and the possibilities for personal redemption.

Engel is concerned essentially with the difficulty of living a meaningful life in an organizational society which, as Paul Goodman has described it, renders one's relationship to his work, his community, and his loved ones less meaningful every day. Belsky's mother suggests that her son read Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle" as an exemplary tale of "a man who lets life go by" but the parallel is never more than literary because Belsky's fate is never "terrible" in the sense that Marcher's was. Similarly, Belsky discovers upon rereading *War and Peace* that whereas "Tolstoy's world was entirely committed to importance . . . things were not so clear and, relatedly, not so energized in [his] world, where half the time he felt he was paddling around in a tepid sea of urine and dishwater." In attempting to explain the meaning of meaninglessness, *Voyager Belsky* ends up by epitomizing it. After a brave beginning, the novel, like its hero, is soon adrift in "a tepid sea," its plot leaking badly and its crew too busy bailing water to be of much use to Mr. Engel or to us.

Jack Kerouac's *Big Sur* is another chapter in a larger work which he now calls *The Duluoz Legend,* the sprawling and none too coherent saga of the Beat Generation as described by the self-acknowledged "King of the Beats." "The whole thing," he tells us in a prefatory note, "forms one enormous comedy, seen through the eyes of poor Ti Jean (me), otherwise known as Jack Duluoz, the world of raging action and folly and also of gentle sweetness seen through the keyhole of his eye."

At some point we come to realize that the King has no clothes and that Kerouac has no talent. Aside from a certain descriptive facility which functions erratically, he shows very little evidence of ever becoming a novelist. His characters are aimless, lifeless, and even witless; his ideas are sophomoric and soporific; his books offer very little in the way of plot, narrative technique, or novelistic inventiveness; and his mind seems incapable of making qualitative distinctions or anything approaching mature judgments. Yet his books are ever being published, bought, and, one suspects, even read.

The reason for this paradoxical situation lies first in the fact that Kerouac takes himself seriously even when nobody else will. Every novel is part of a "legend," of "an enormous comedy"; each depicts a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"world of raging action and folly" where mild adventures are "the greatest" and mere acquaintances are "saints": and all this is told by the "King of the Beats." Now in an era of self-deprecating novels and anti-romantic novelists, of a conformist society inhabited by inhibited people, Kerouac's romantic enthusiasm, excessive exhibitionism, and adolescent rebellion may seem appealing. It is not Kerouac's art that is attractive but his life: that sentimental, irresponsible, and slightly frenetic satisfaction of *libido* at all costs. "What is reality for Kerouac," as one enthusiast has observed, "is suppressed desires for most Americans."

Camus tells us that in romanticism we hear "the cry of outraged innocence." Obsessed with the defiance of law—moral or divine—the romantic finds himself outlawed from within the system: he manages to make crime appealing without actually advocating it. Thus, romanticism's "most original creation is not, primarily, the revolutionary, but, logically enough, the dandy." The Beats are essentially dandies in reverse. (Even Kerouac notes a new dandyism among the younger Beats in *Big Sur.*) In both cases, narcissism has turned revolt inward into affectation rather than outward into coherent rebellion. As Camus describes him, the dandy (like the beatnik) exists only in reaction:

> Profligate, like all people without a rule of life, he is coherent as an actor. But an actor implies a public; the dandy can only play a part by setting himself up in opposition. He can only be sure of his own existence by finding it in the expression of others' faces. . . . The dandy, therefore, is always compelled to astonish. Singularity is his vocation, excess his way to perfection. Perpetually incomplete, always on the fringe of things, he compels others to create him, while denying their values. He plays at life because he is unable to live it.

Like the dandies, the Beats live by public toleration. We tend to impart to them a quality of masculine non-conformity but in reality, as Paul Goodman has pointed out, "one is stunned at how conventional and law-fearing these lonely middle-class fellows are." If any will reach beyond the conventions of the Beat—as Baudelaire reached beyond the limits of dandyism—into the realm of art, it must be only the hippest and most dangerous: perhaps William Burroughs. Certainly this will not be left to Kerouac who, working well within literary and social conventionality, is significant not as the major novelist of the Beat Generation but as its chief *amanuensis.*

Big Sur is a case in point. Here we are told of the crack-up of the King; his escape to Big Sur and his return to San Francisco; his affair with the girl friend of one of his "buddies"; another trip to Big Sur; the onset of insanity almost simultaneous with the moment of truth, recovery, and return to the living. There is a lot of silly philosophizing about death ("because the reason I yell death so much is because I'm really yelling life, because you can't have death without life") but also

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a growing self-consciousness and ironic awareness of how the Beat Generation is aging. ("Like those pathetic five highschool kids who all came to my door in Long Island one night wearing jackets that said "Dharma Bums" on them, all expecting me to be 25 years old according to a mistake on a book jacket and here I am old enough to be their father.") If for an instant we are reminded of Scott Fitzgerald's remarkable essay, "The Crack-up"—Kerouac suggests a parallel himself—it is only for an instant. Again we are left with the vapid minutes of a previous meeting whose point continually escapes us. For the most part, the prose and ideas are on the level of the conclusion:

> I'll get my ticket and say goodbye on flower day and leave all San Francisco behind and go back home across autumn America and it'll all be like it was in the beginning——Simple golden eternity blessing all——Nothing ever happened——Not even this——St. Carolyn by the Sea will go on being golden one way or the other——The little boy will grow up and be a great man——There'll be farewells and smiles——My mother'll be waiting for me glad——The corner of the yard where Tyke [his dog] is buried will be a new and fragrant shrine making my home more homelike somehow——On soft Spring nights I'll stand in the yard under the stars——Something good will come out of all things yet——And it will be golden and eternal just like that——There's no need to say another word.

No, indeed. There's no need to say another word.

Twenty years separates Wright Morris' first novel, *Man and Boy*, from his eleventh, *What a Way to Go*. Why in those two decades Morris' distinctive talents have been enjoyed by only a small coterie remains a mystery to me. Perhaps the secret lies in his great versatility which allows him the freedom continually to change his focus but denies us the liberty of ever pinning him down. More likely it has something to do with that slightly cock-eyed world of his, a world definitely mad but with a special madness that may be as difficult to appreciate as it is to depict.

A novel of innocents abroad, *What a Way to Go* describes the reluctant wooing of a forward American teenager by a retiring professor of English. The man is Arnold Soby, searching among the artifacts of Venice and Greece for his vanishing identity. The maid is Cynthia Pomeroy, finding amid the relics of Greece and Venice her emerging identity. Other travellers include Cynthia's two chaperones: Miss Winifred Throop, who affects a wig, indulges a weakness for tippling, and presents to the world "a face like that of Boswell's Johnson," and Miss Mathilde Kollwitz, a health fiend who approaches life with a Germanic thoroughness and about whom "there was no nonsense." Also on board are a slightly decadent Italian painter; a clutch of German *Wandervogel* including a miniature Austrian photographer who misses being *echt deutsch* by being 3/7 Jewish; a professor from Basel; and a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

roguish cat named Aschenbach after the hero of Mann's *Death in Venice.*

A bit of an Aschenbach himself, Soby is part Prufrock and part Strether, appearing "sensible, respectable, invulnerable," researching in libraries his life's work on "The Wisdom of the Body." Cynthia, on the other hand, is all things to all men: Primavera to the Italian, Nausicaa and Miss Liebfraumilch to the *echt deutsch;* Tadziu and Lolita, perhaps, to Soby. But whether "Primavera in Venice or Lolita in Winnetka," Cynthia is woman incarnate—a sort of Venus with braces —and the wisdom of the body which she imparts to Soby is of the kind that cannot be found in books. "Everyone his own Pygmalion," observes Miss Throop, and Soby, playing creator, finds himself created.

On the one hand, Morris is concerned with the differing aspects of creating beauty. "Was it not strange," Soby reflects, "that only lovers could compete with artists? Transform the object, that is, according to taste?" On the other hand, he is concerned with the differing aspects of perceiving beauty. "Or had that first glimpse of beauty," Soby wonders while watching Cynthia, "the word made flesh, established in man the two poles of his nature—to materialize and to spiritualize? To pass away in a delirium within sight of the beloved object, like Aschenbach, or to sit and stare like cannibals at the grape-stained lips."

In its central relationship between an aging man and a young girl, *What a Way to Go* is reminiscent of Morris' earlier work, *Love Among the Cannibals.* But it is a measure of his versatility that the two novels are so different, the one dealing with Aschenbach's delirium and the other with the cannibal's delight. As a satire of tourist manners in the old world and a travel guide to courtly love in the new, *What a Way to Go* is shrewd, funny, and beautifully written. May it bring to Wright Morris a measure of the popular success that he has deserved all along.

Morte d'Urban is the first novel by J. F. Powers, a writer who has won critical acclaim with two volumes of short stories. Mr. Powers writes about the Catholic clergy and his stories are distinguished by their control, compassion, irony, and wit. His material is usually the sins of the flesh among men of the cloth and he has a facility for making the clergy more human, more understandable, and more entertaining than any other writer I know.

Now clerical life ranks just below academic life in the hierarchy of unpromising material for art. ("If seminarians began to write novels about life in the seminary," as Flannery O'Connor has observed, "there would soon be a few less seminarians.") Yet Mr. Powers has managed to turn this unpromising material into a fine novel, thoughtful in its delineation of character and fascinating in its description of life in a midwestern Catholic order.

Someone in *Morte d'Urban* remarks that there are two kinds of parish priests: "priest-priests and priest-promoters." Father Urban belongs to the second group: a major league "operator" in the minor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

league order of St. Clement. Aptly named, Urban is the urban man complete with attaché case. In a moment of reverie he

> just sat there, sipping scotch and seeing himself as he might have been—in some kind of business you could breathe in, perhaps heavy machinery, much of it going overseas, lots of travel, meeting fellows like Haile Selassie and Farouk's father, whatever his name was, and operating out of a spacious office on Michigan Avenue, high up, with a view of the lake, walnut paneling, Persian carpets, furnished with gifts from potentates and dictators of the better sort, a tree at Christmas, efficient rosy-cheeked girls in white-collared dark dresses, Irish girls hired for the purity of their vocables, and himself hardly ever there.

Transferred unaccountably from "the field" to the sidelines of the Order's dilapidated retreat home in rural Minnesota, Urban is soon faced with a crisis which involves his divided loyalty to two realms: the one peopled by patrons and golfing partners like Billy Cosgrove whom the world was too much with and the other inhabited by gentle, naive clerics like Father John whom the world was perhaps not enough with.

As a study of a man and a church caught between quick profits and more long-range benefits ("I see our good friends the Dalmatian Fathers are now selling hams") *Morte d'Urban* is first-rate satire. By the end of the novel we share Father Urban's doubts as to "how the Catholic Church (among large corporations) could be rated second only to Standard Oil in efficiency, as *Time* reported a few years back." But Powers is after bigger game: the fate of a man's spiritual life in a time when the distinctions between God's realm and Caesar's have become increasingly blurred. The title suggests the death of one Urban while the ending hints at the birth of another. But its echo of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* also suggests the contrast between the two worlds which Henry Adams fixed by the symbols of the Virgin and the Dynamo.

Father John, in preparing "a *scholarly* children's edition" of the Arthurian legend for young Catholic readers, compares his less worldly view with Urban's "vision of life in late medieval times, when nothing and nobody was for sure, when kings and prelates were selling out right and left." John is centering his version on Sir Launcelot who, after his affair with Guenever was brought to light, "died to the world," entering a monastery and ending his life as Father Launcelot. There is a strong suggestion that while Father John is rewriting this epic, Father Urban is ironically reliving it. If Urban is not "the noblest knight in the world," his life, death, and rebirth are curiously and deliciously reminiscent at crucial points.

I have heard some Catholics temper their praise of Mr. Powers with a concern for the worldliness of his priests. They seemed to feel that by making his clerics *so* human Powers was either criticizing his reli-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gion or revealing some state secret about the fallibility of men of God. But *Morte d'Urban* is not *Elmer Gantry* and Powers, with some noble assistance from St. Bernard of Clairvaux, makes clear his position that the strength of the Church is greater than the weaknesses of the men in it. In any case, *Morte d'Urban* can be highly recommended on a strictly non-denominational basis.

In *Voyager Belsky,* Cora writes to her husband, Francesco: "We've all got the poison of the lousy war in us too, and no penicillin is going to get that out of our blood, or mercury, or any other of the medicinal gods." The majority of modern fiction is about this poison in one way or another and the recent outpouring of war novels suggests that the memory of that holocaust remains vividly in our consciousness. If it is fair to say that most contemporary novels are products of the war and not the peace, it might be useful to note that many post-war writers are precisely that: post-war and not peacetime. Among these novelists there is a group for whom war is the only coherent image. John Horne Burns belonged to this group as does Norman Mailer. Such a writer is James Jones.

The army forms the matrix of Jones' world not only because it is what he knows best but because it must be what he loves and despises most. Jones is essentially a novelist of destruction and the military world seems to provide both a recognizable object to hate and a manageable subject by which blind outrage is metamorphosed into calculated detestation. *From Here to Eternity* was successful partly because it possessed such a coherent image; *Some Came Running* failed partly because it lacked such an image. It showed that Jones was at home in the army and that his characters become unendurable only after they are mustered out. In *The Thin Red Line* he is at his destructive best and the ferocity of his vision is evident from his very first sentence: "This book is cheerfully dedicated to those greatest and most heroic of all human endeavors, WAR and WARFARE; may they never cease to give us the pleasure, excitement and adrenal stimulation that we need, or provide us with the heroes, the presidents and leaders, the monuments and museums which we erect to them in the name of PEACE."

The title of the new novel refers first to Kipling's " 'Thin red line of 'eroes,'/ When the drums begin to roll—" and to an old midwestern saying that "There's only a thin red line between the sane and the mad." The novel takes that thin line of 'eroes and pushes them across that thin line of sanity. The heroes are members of a rifle company named C for Charlie and the action takes place during the critical months of the Guadalcanal campaign.

The Thin Red Line is impressive on several counts: first as an exciting narrative; second as an excellent job of imaginative reportage; and finally as a novel of great scope and scale. But what distinguishes the novel above and beyond its sense of brutal realism, is the clarity and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fixity of its author's vision. In its depiction of war as a cold-blooded business operation *The Thin Red Line* resembles Mitchell Goodman's *The End of It*; in its portrayal of the battle area as "a crazyhouse" it is reminiscent of *Catch-22;* in its abhorrence of authority, officers and the terrible waste of war, it can be compared to many novels; but in its blunt description of war as perverted sexuality it is unusually penetrating. "Could it be," one soldier thinks after participating in a "failed assault," "that *all* war was basically sexual? Not just in psych theory, but in fact, actually and emotionally? A sort of sexual perversion? Or a complex of sexual perversions? That would make a funny thesis and God help the human race."

Comparisons with *The Naked and the Dead* are, I suppose, inevitable though perhaps misleading. Whereas Mailer's interest was primarily political, Jones's is essentially psychosexual. Mailer chose the Pacific War partly because it "had a reactionary overtone which my young progressive-liberal nose smelled" while Jones selected the Guadalcanal campaign because of the "special qualities which the name Guadalcanal evoked for my generation." It may make more sense to relate *The Thin Red Line* to *Catch-22* not because they share the same means but because in a strange way they come to the same end: the one turning reality into nightmare and the other transforming nightmare into reality. It is a sign of our time and a measure of their art that we cannot say which is more horrible or which is more real.

ROGER SALE

Doctors at Sea

> Without naming specific writers, I suggest that the contemporary American novel is still the best place to look for instances of lives which seek to be whole and unafraid.

I HAVE ALWAYS SECRETLY BELIEVED the suggestion expressed here by Herbert Gold, and it is always gratifying to discover that others harbor your grudges. But it is an unsettling sentence to place beside the three collections of essays by well known local talent, including Mr. Gold, now at hand.[1] It does not matter that these books are not as good as the best recent American novel; it does matter that their authors have at least temporarily stopped writing fiction. Why does a novelist turn

[1] A VIEW OF MY OWN, by *Elizabeth Hardwick*. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $4.50. THE AGE OF HAPPY PROBLEMS, by *Herbert Gold*. Dial Press. $4.95. HELLS AND BENEFITS, by *Benjamin DeMott*. Basic Books. $5.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away from a metier apparently not yet exhausted in order to describe more discursively what is wrong with our literature and our society? Why should he feel we can never get back to work until we know what is wrong with us? These three books, like *The Territory Ahead* and *Advertisements for Myself,* are good books to have, but nonetheless some not quite acknowledged air of evasion hangs over them and their tacit refusal to go on imagining lives whole and unafraid.

Benjamin DeMott speaks more directly to this problem than does Mr. Gold:

> Part of the difficulty stems from the fact that enthusiasts of the article—the random magazine piece about some contemporary issue —have lately been claiming that the form is especially admired now because at their contemporary best, articles are better written and deeper in feeling than novels at *their* contemporary best. Whether or not the point is sound, it won't do as an explanation of the fiction writer's aping of the article hack. The real key to enthusiasm for articles lies, not in the exquisiteness of the article writer's feelings, but instead in the direction of what is called *tone.* The article does not presume. Here, it says, is a phase of something, an aspect, a view. Here is a subject: I announce it in my opening sentence. Here is a scrap of human behavior, a political event: let me describe it to you briefly. Here is a book, let me tell you what it is about, I shan't keep you long. . . .

If a writer puts that much ammunition in a critic's hands, he can hardly be surprised if something goes off.

What Mr. DeMott describes as the predominant tone of the article can be found in all three collections; they are good books for reading at lunch. C. S. Lewis reads Boswell at tea, my friends have *Time* and the *Partisan Review* in their bathrooms, but I return home each noon and expectantly ask for the mail. When for the fifth straight day the reply is that there is nothing, I feel much better when I can sit down to something like this:

> In letters we can reform without practice, beg without humiliation, snip and shape embarrassing experience to the measure of our own desires—this is a benevolent form. The ideal self expressed in letters is not a crudely sugary affair except in dreary personalities; in any case, the ideal is very much a part of the character, having its twenty-four hours a day to get through, and being no less unique in its combinations than one's fingerprints.

This comes on the first page of Elizabeth Hardwick's *A View of My Own;* it is perhaps not a profound thought and may not be even an original one, but it was new to me and I read on, grateful to Miss Hardwick for insuring the pleasantness of the next hour. A little further on is a fine comparison of the self-destruction of Hart Crane with that of Fitzgerald, and then some fresh remarks about growing up in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the hotels that Henry James Sr. called home. Nothing is looked at very thoroughly and no first rate authors are considered—Miss Hardwick's genius is for finding terms both sympathetic and reasonable for the little known or the easily misunderstood. It may be that these essays fit Mr. DeMott's strictures quoted above, but of the three writers under consideration Miss Hardwick seems most at home doing what she is doing and the mildness of her manner seems to derive far more from modesty than from self-contempt. The book is reminiscent of another fine lunchtime collection, *The Common Reader;* like Mrs. Woolf Miss Hardwick avoids careful analysis and is content with one or two good sentences in each essay—the ladies know, coolly, wisely, and a bit infuriatingly, how few essays achieve that much.

But there are attendant dangers which Mr. DeMott has not located and these Miss Hardwick does not entirely avoid. When Miss Hardwick is rather girlish in her replies to Simone de Beauvoir—"This is not to say that women aren't interested in sex *at all.* They clearly want a lot of it, but in the end the men of the world seem to want still more" —I, for one, am charmed, even flattered. But when she jokes about literary marriages, she is merely cute:

> The Brownings, the Webbs, the Garnetts, the Carlyles, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield—the literary couple is a peculiar English domestic manufacture, useful no doubt in a country with difficult winters.

"Even from this distance and without peeking at the jacket biography," I feel compelled to reply, "I know who you are and you know I know who you are," and I am annoyed at the implicit invitation to reread certain well known recent poems and to speculate about January nights in Boston or New York. And associated with this tendency is a curious naivete:

> The extraordinary effect of *A Long Day's Journey*—the tale at last told of James O'Neill, the drug addict mother, the drunkard Jamie, and the difficult Eugene himself—was a fitting requiem to this peculiar, heroic career. T. S. Eliot thought it, "one of the most moving plays I've ever seen."

I imagine even an admirer of O'Neill would be insulted by that last sentence, but the reply of someone unrepentantly bored by him is even harsher—Gee, maybe I've done wrong, but do you have to send me off to bed with a spanking from Big Daddy himself? I turn quickly to the next essay, feeling bad that someone who can say so well what the claims of Christina Stead or Caryl Chessman are on my imagination, someone who can criticize without being nasty and who can be decent in the face of things she dislikes (Boston, say, or David Riesman), can fail so often and in such irritating minor ways to respect the imagination of an admiring reader whose interests are not hers.

After the deliberate generosity of Miss Hardwick, the restless com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mentary of Mr. Gold on the way we live now. It has always seemed to me that Mr. Gold has not found the best subject for his novels so that he tends to employ four or five effects in a search for the right one. He nervously shifts characters, sceneries, styles, and he lets his love of words and of writing serve, finally, as his subject. At least I accept this as the reason I find his stories better than his novels and both better than his essays; until he finds his best subject, Mr. Gold is better off hovering and swiping rather than standing still. In *The Age of Happy Problems* the best pieces are, thus, on unsettled things, Reno and teaching humanities at Wayne State, and the long "Death in Miami Beach," which is about almost everything Mr. Gold can think of, is oddly the most satisfying of all. Here he moves from the slaughter of turtles to a cry for help in a diner to a doctor he once knew in Cleveland who now pushes his blind wife along the beach, and he mixes in comments on what he is writing and how it makes him feel—if you do not find the result merely silly, you can find a haunting tale of a nervous but determined and sensitive confrontation of mortality.

But most of the essays are about more obvious and familiar subjects and what Mr. Gold has to say about them is, accordingly, more obvious and familiar. This is in part the result of Mr. Gold's having written on them elsewhere and at one time or another he made them fresh for us —Cleveland is much more interesting in his stories than here, and "Divorce as a Moral Act" is missing the terrifying force of "Love and Like." But even more often the obviousness and the familiarity are the result of a failure to do more than repeat what is in the air:

> We can create ourselves in our own image. And what is our own image? The buttery face in the Pond's advertisement, the epicene face in the Marlboro publicity.

I tiptoe to the mirror and see blue eyes, whiskers, and an image of the television screen Mr. Gold hates so much. I look at Mr. Gold's picture on the back of the dust jacket. Our image? No, anything but ours. Yet Mr. Gold cannot be bothered any more than I can to go out and find just whose face, if anyone's, is that of the Marlboro man. Again:

> We no longer have to keep up with the Joneses; we must keep up with Clifton Fadiman. He is watching *you*.

No, Mr. Gold, not me, not you, and probably not anyone either of us knows; it would be difficult to demonstrate, I suspect, that Mr. Fadiman can be said to be watching anyone. But of course Mr. Gold is not interested in such a demonstration—in the next two paragraphs we encounter the following names, all presumably icons for people with happy problems: Gilbert Highet, Elizabeth Bowen, Arnold Toynbee, Jacques Barzun, *Fortune, The Reporter,* Salzburg music festivals, Robert Shaw Chorale, Evelyn Waugh. With such a profusion of rapiers, one would imagine Mr. Gold could épater les bourgeois with one or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two, but the hits are few and the method is of course terribly sloppy. Miss Hardwick would know well enough that there are distinctions to be made and she would try to make them, but Mr. Gold is off again, smugly quoting Elvis Presley and Yeats in consecutive sentences, and soon he is telling us for the fourth, fifth, and sixth time that Wouk, Hawley, and Sloan Wilson are not our best writers. Obviously most of these essays were written to buy groceries and no one interested in Mr. Gold's career can complain. But collected in a book they look depressing. Mr. Gold has done himself an injustice.

Mr. DeMott, on the other hand, has really tried to make something of the periodical essay; *Hells and Benefits* offers none of Miss Hardwick's modesty and not very much of Mr. Gold's references to known subjects with the best known phrases. It is an ambitious, witty, humorless collection whose best arguments are more subtle and more complicated than those of almost any other recent minister to the American condition. *The Age of Happy Problems* is only a minor part of a novelistic career, but *Hells and Benefits* seeks nothing less for its author than the mantle of Edmund Wilson. Its style, which often seems a direct imitation of the late Henry James, is seldom guilty of the fluency of the usual magazine article, and its attitudes, whenever possible, are sternly unfashionable. Furthermore, Mr. DeMott is often willing to take considerable risks; it could not have been easy for a Gentile to speak critically as well as respectfully of certified Jewish writers in *Commentary* or to insist in *The American Scholar* on the nihilism of the sick comics. Even earlier Mr. DeMott was confused with Norman Cousins for his praise of *By Love Possessed*—a foolish judgment, surely, but anyone willing to risk that equation in the name of justice must be accorded sympathy and praise.

Most of these essays begin with some item in the news—the moment Mr. DeMott senses skullduggery or simplification at work, he is off to see for himself—to the FCC hearings on television, to the fringes of official Washington, to a party honoring the winners of the National Book Award, to the launching of the Peace Corps, to a party announcing the publication of the Adams papers. The effort in each instance is to dislodge the easily accepted view and to emerge with some fresh account of where we are. The method finds its happiest material when the subject is literary; when Mr. DeMott moves into politics or sociology he often gives the impression of simply insisting that he is being original by going to places where you and I would never go. In one instance, at least, the result is nigh perfect—an essay on Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel.* Mr. DeMott begins by explaining at great length the maverick positions Fiedler holds in academic and literary establishments badly in need of eccentricity, and then moves on to deplore the way Fiedler's success as a public relations man has clouded his real achievement:

The case is, in short, that Fiedler's main subject is not fear of sex

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> but fear of the loss of humanity, the self, wholeness. At the heart of the myth that he dislodges, you encounter a human figure afraid of losing either his right or his capacity to speak out of the center of his being. Sexual aberrancy is a symptom of this fear, as is the thinning out of human character in the pages of novels. The flight from society is another symptom. The intensification of a single strain or Personality—hatred or love or intellectual passion or the tendency to chuckle at Human Wisdom—is yet another. But Fiedler is absorbed by all these symptoms, and is not a mere scandalmonger, as some imply. . . . What his book says, over and over, about American novels is: There are no people here at all.

This seems to me precisely right in its location of Fiedler's fineness; it explains the case better than Fiedler himself has been able to do. Here Mr. DeMott has focused immense lore about fashions, knowledge of literature, and an unceasing moral concern, on a book that had, at the time, received only irrelevant criticism and illiterate praise. To be able to do this much is to place oneself among the foremost of contemporary journalists.

Which is to say that Mr. DeMott is wonderful to read at lunch. But of course he aspires to more than this, and, as has been hinted, the wider his aims the more difficult it is to assent. Mr. DeMott is committed to offering genuine insight into the possibilities for the future, yet what he produces is meager and derivative. The moral and intellectual basis of the sentences about Fiedler quoted above, for instance, is purely Lawrentian, and although we hear a great deal elsewhere about the sense of powerlessness in America (often superbly documented), we are not taken any farther *forward* than "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*." We are told about the need for a various human spirit, yet the only varied figure described is John Adams. Mr. DeMott describes the particular case of Adams wonderfully, but as a way of insisting upon variousness in general it is useless. All Mr. DeMott gives is a list of Adams' qualities, and if lists are all we need then the weight-and-fortune scales at the five and ten are adequate. His key terms are "complication," the "feeling" and the "thinking" person, "new life," "fully awake"—and the terms usually look as bare in the book as they do here because Mr. DeMott has done no more than throw up antonyms for the moral limpness or misplaced enthusiasm he sees.

There is a certain naivete, really, in the assumption that one can diagnose a country's ills by carrying a stethoscope around to the most chic or the most apparently fruitless gatherings, especially when the doctor is recommending such homely remedies as more sleep and tonics. There is a certain absurdity in the way Mr. DeMott is forced to drum up interest in events we otherwise would never have heard of: "In August 1960 the military was assembling for an annual meeting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the old Wardman Park." You remember the old Wardman Park, surely. "The meeting was no insignificant occasion," Mr. DeMott assures us, yet why? General Gavin and Robert Lovett were there, "and the presence on the program of figures like 'Dr. Morrough P. O'Brien, Dean Emeritus, College of Engineering, University of California' strengthened, in print, the impression that sober inquiry was in progress." Humbug, a paragraph written only so that Mr. DeMott can sadly report in the next that the meeting did not deliver all it promised. There is, finally, a certain offensiveness in the assumption that literary New York is literary America and that one can talk knowingly about television after seeing *The Untouchables* and *The Play of the Week* a few times and testimony before the FCC is heard.

Naivete, absurdity, offensiveness—strong words indeed, and they would be much too strong were it not for the hopes that an enterprise like Mr. DeMott's arouses in someone who likes to read at times other than lunch. Five years ago Mr. DeMott spoke, presumably about himself, of a "post-political citizen who is, in his secret soul and in contempt of history, bored with hell." A great deal seems to have happened since then; now Mr. DeMott is interested in hell as only someone who had been able to express his previous boredom could be interested, i.e., he wants to transform private and domestic virtues into public virtues and he is determined to speak against any enterprise in which can be detected dishonesty or infidelity. This effort must be applauded even by one who does not feel damned and who thinks Mr. DeMott is looking in the wrong places. But the pieces in *Hells and Benefits* are precisely that, pieces, reports on things seen by a man recently converted and therefore in a great hurry. This means that the positive counters of faith and hope are allowed to become dusty and are liable to misuse, and so almost every essay comes out in the same place, often with exactly the same words. The impression this gives is of someone carefully studying the tides the world over who returns to report that the sea is salt. Mr. DeMott ought to be able to say more than this, yet he continues to find more dragons and more windmills to keep him from learning to tell the two apart or from discovering better ways of ridding the world of its real adversaries.

If there were some chance of a definitive abstraction, a *Democracy in America,* then one would be tempted to side with the essay against the novel. Only a book as good and as bad as *Hells and Benefits* can kindle the hope for such a work, but the event would be both difficult to anticipate and foolish to expect. The soberer and really more hopeful reflection is that all three writers considered above are best when they are most novelistic, and that the best soil for future growth lies in that old vineyard where lives can be more fully imagined, more whole, more unafraid.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CECIL HEMLEY

A Return to Reality

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT AT THE PRESENT TIME a substantial amount of good poetry is being written in America. Four of the five poets[1] that I am considering here are Americans and all of them are talented. Each of them is very much himself and is associated in this article with the others to a large extent through the accidents of publication and review. It should be noted, however, that they are all poets who reached their maturity after the end of the second world war. No one who reads them can help but see that they are very different in manner from the pre-war poets.

This change in style has been mourned in certain quarters. The twenties are regarded by some as the golden era of American creativity. To the degree that this is romanticism it can be explained by the fact that many of the staunchest admirers of that decade were young at the time and confuse the delight that they felt in discovering "the great experimenters" with their own sense of youth. But this, of course, is not the whole story. The avant-gardists of the twenties conceived of themselves as revolutionaries in both form and content. They were the destroyers of old values, sometimes even of language itself. Those who consider their method the only program for art must be disappointed in what is being written currently. The new poets do not come as the apostles of change; rather they look for a new stability. They have been born into an apparently chaotic world at the end of an era of apocalyptic movements all of which have failed. Only the pure sciences have maintained their prestige. But pure science is not a way of life. The new poets are increasingly leaving science and pseudo-science alone and are once more writing poetry about what they know best. For this they do not need experimental techniques.

Because they are so much less pretentious than their forbears, their art may seem at first glance small. They do not write vast cyclical poems about history or time. Instead they talk about their mothers and fathers and wives and children. Poetry always did concern itself with such matters before human beings became discredited. Perhaps during the twenties we acquired an illicit taste for something that was neither quite poetry, economics, sociology, nor anthropology, but a great miasma of nothing. If this is so, the new poetry can be considered the beginnings of a kind of renaissance. Not only is reality being restored but poetry itself.

[1] ALL MY PRETTY ONES, by *Anne Sexton*. Houghton Mifflin. $3.00. TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARK, by *William Stafford*. Harper & Row. $3.50. IMPERATIVES, by *Anthony Ostroff*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.95. WATER STREET, by *James Merrill*. Atheneum. $1.65. POEMS, 1947-1961, by *Elizabeth Sewell*. Univ. of North Carolina. $4.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The most memorable poems in Anne Sexton's new book involve death and the response to death. The title of the volume is taken from the scene in *Macbeth* in which MacDuff, learning of the entire extinction of his family, cries out "All my pretty ones?" in a poignant exclamation of disbelief. How this relates to Mrs. Sexton is made explicit in the dedication to the very first poem, "The Truth the Dead Know": "For my mother, born March 1902, died March 1959, and my father, born February 1900, died June 1959." It is easy to understand how so much catastrophe coming so quickly can create crisis. Mrs. Sexton's book is a record of her crisis.

> Gone, I say and walk from church,
> refusing the stiff procession to the grave,
> letting the dead ride alone in the hearse.
> It is June. I am tired of being brave.

The sure attack, the fine use of sound, make it clear from the start that Mrs. Sexton is a lyricist of power. If one does not read carefully and accepts the hypnotic music of the lines, one can even think one is reading a conventional elegy. But of course the poem is no such thing. Earlier epochs would have found it immensely shocking. Not only does the mourner refuse to accompany the body to the grave, but she drives off to the cape "to cultivate myself where the sun gutters from the sky." We are in a post-Christian world where ceremonial has ceased to be important and death is something one seeks to dismiss from one's mind.

There is no doubt that the poet wants us to associate herself with the "I" of the poem; it is Anne Sexton who has not driven to the cemetery. This identification with the writer has the advantage of intensifying our feelings, but the disadvantage of embarrassing us slightly. There were good reasons why past eras were reticent on such matters. However, the poem rises above the confession and achieves great beauty. For one thing the serious tone of the verses shows that the refusal to mourn is not successful. The mourner does not escape her grief. She is haunted.

Mrs. Sexton has a fine gift for metaphor and in this poem she is at her best. "In another country people die," she tells us. It is not only forcefully said, but true. The death of the psyche, if indeed it does occur, is never witnessed. She goes on to ask:

> And what of the dead? They lie without shoes
> In their stone boats. They are more like stone
> Than the sea would be if it stopped.

These lines I think are an example of Mrs. Sexton's power of creating images that are amazingly suggestive. She is on the cape looking out at the sea. The dead are in stone boats, and actually they are enclosed. Presumably then they are sailing. But not on the sea that she is watching. They are surely sailing away from her in time. And this in a sense is what she wants. But she remains haunted by their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stillness and their unknowability. The sea that she is watching could become dead also but its calm would not be as frozen as the stone faces she has looked upon.

Anyone who has experienced the shock of bereavement will realize that Anne Sexton has captured the feelings of the recent mourner marvellously. The landscape becomes infected with death; death enters the brain. But yet the fact of death remains incomprehensible. The corpse that one viewed is not one's loved one. So Anne Sexton writes of ghosts, of the search for religious consolation which she rejects because "need is not enough." No wonder she suffers nervous collapse. She is the mourner who cannot stop mourning. The very first word in the book is "gone," and the last poem, viewing the catastrophe from a year later, finds the dead still present.

> Dearest,
> It is snowing, grotesquely snowing,
> upon the small faces of the dead,
> those dear loudmouths, gone for over a year,
> buried side by side
> like little wrens.
> But why should I complain?
> The dead turn over casually
> thinking. . . .

There is a terrifying quality to these lines, for the dead are not accepted as dead, but are viewed as incarcerated in the earth. They have an underground existence which is not that of spirits. The snow is falling on them. Perhaps this is the way secular man is doomed to view death. He cannot give up the reality of those he has held dear, but can find no container in which the past is held. Mrs. Sexton is a ruthlessly honest poet of great ability. Her book is both shocking and poignant.

William Stafford, a Kansan who now lives in Portland, Oregon, writes a very American poetry. He evokes the prairie towns of his childhood and the western canyons. The starkness of the landscape has got into his lines. *Traveling Through the Dark* is a very appropriate title for his book. One thinks of roads winding over mountains which dwarf the human. Man is in a cosmos in which he understands little. But this does not mean that he must lose his humanity.

Stafford writes with great concision but his verse has the quality of speech; he obviously is not interested in a big rhetoric. Thus the first stanza of the title poem of the book appears artless and casual.

> Traveling through the dark I found a deer
> dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
> It is usually best to roll them into the canyon;
> that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But at the very moment he appears to be digressing, he is giving essential information and creating both atmosphere and theme.

> By flow of the tail light I stumbled back of the car
> and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
> she had stiffened already, almost cold.
> I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.
> My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—
> her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
> alive, still, never to be born.
> Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The sympathy found in these lines is characteristic of Stafford. He appears to feel instinctively for those who have been injured or destroyed. But he does not sentimentalize. In this instance there is nothing to do but push the deer off the road. The fawn would not be born anyway, and it and its mother have become a hazard. Since we are traveling through the dark that is all we can do, but it doesn't hurt anyone to wish that it were otherwise.

Art like this is alive with a kind of feeling which for years has been out of fashion. Once more our poets dare to exhibit tenderness. Perhaps we have had an end of nausea. Stafford sums up his philosophy in a poem in which he contrasts himself with his father who "didn't really belong in history." He goes on to say, "He was a stranger to me, for I belong." Stafford, it seems, prefers to be saved and not heroic like his father.

> I want to be as afraid as the teeth are big;
> I want to be dumb as the wise are wrong:
> I'd just as soon be pushed by events to where I belong.

Conformism? Hardly. Stafford is reacting against types of cosmic rebellion which lead only to disaster. He sees the horror of the one who is outside of society. These are the opening lines of one of his best poems, "Thinking for Berky."

> In the late night listening from bed
> I have joined the ambulance or the patrol
> screaming toward some drama, the kind of end
> that Berky must have some day, if she isn't dead.
> The wildest of all, her mother and father cruel,
> farming out there beyond the old stone quarry
> where highschool lovers parked their lurching cars,
> Berky learned to love in that dark school.

I don't see how this sort of verse can be better written. No one can complain that it is not modern enough but it never deviates from its purpose. Stafford's excitement and concern are shown in the strong, turbulent movement of the lines.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Early her face was turned away from home
toward any hardworking place; but still her soul
with terrible things to do, was alive, looking out
for the rescue that—surely some day—would have to come.

"Terrible things to do" is brilliant and enters the poem at exactly the right place. Stafford has great moral vision but he is never didactic. As Stafford delineates Berky she becomes an unforgettable character. Later in the poem he tells us "that justice will take us millions of intricate moves." Stafford is from Kansas which, as I remember, is next door to Missouri. He is pragmatic in his approach to life; he has to be shown, but nevertheless he has a tough optimism. He is a very good poet.

Anthony Ostroff works with great skill in a variety of forms. He is not as intense a poet as Anne Sexton, nor does he have as fine an eye for nature as William Stafford, but he has a broader range of ideas. He has obviously read much and thought much and has established his position in a coherent manner. In his "Polemic" he notes:

Now you have made a perfect new
World, inside your head,
My friend, look your last at that view,
The world you made is never true.

All you shun can yet undo
That world you love instead
Of Man. Good friend, you misconstrue
A world you never made for rue.

You cannot lie alone. Unto
The last, narrow bed,
Good man. Man is Man's just due.
The world you never made is you.

These lines, of course, have a broad application and I imagine that they define what Ostroff likes not only in philosophy but in literature and in art. It is clear from his poems that he has little patience with the over-subjective, the egotistical, the bizarre. He leads us back from our dark inner regions into a world of sunlight in which there are more seasons than winter. This very real world includes for him what used to be dismissed by a certain kind of poet as "bourgeois relationships." So he states in "Announcement":

Dead center of my span,
    And most aware
Of those three who spin,
    Tie and tear,

I take my wife as wife
    And son as son,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And claim this skein my life
Until it's done.

There is a fine geniality to these lines that make me think of a poet like Herrick. Emotional balance has also been out of fashion and it is fine to have Ostroff showing that it need not be unpoetic. In the quoted lines the balancing of the three spinning fates with another trinity, man, wife, and child is very nice. For when the Fates spin the world this trinity is precisely what they spin.

When Anne Sexton is bad, she rambles into meaningless autobiography and overloads her poem with detail. William Stafford in his less successful efforts flattens out and is uninteresting. Ostroff's failing, and there are not many examples in this book, is the made-up poem. I have no idea why he bothered to include "Letter from the Dark Side of the Moon." Apparently a newspaper clipping concerning a proposed military encampment on the moon took his fancy. No doubt conditions for the advanced unit will be as bad as he predicts in these very skillful verses, but I can't see that it is a matter of any importance. A man should throw away such clever efforts who can write as fine a lyric as "Anniversary 1955."

James Merrill's poetry has been steadily improving. At his best he writes with elegance and charm. At his worst he continues to commit certain kinds of errors which are generally associated with the flippant school of modern poetry. He is not a satirist and his jokes, which often depend on what Winters calls pseudo-reference, would be just as well kept to himself. He is really a poet of love and nostalgia. The poems about his childhood are fine, "Swimming by Night" is excellent. But "Letter from Egypt" I find tedious and foolish.

When our son died
We cured his little frame,
Scoured, pickled, overlaid head to toe
The ultimate forged antique
With augmentingly non-literal translations . . .

This is such heavy humor that it sinks on the breath.

The only reason that I mention the bad poems at all is to use whatever influence I may have with him to get him to discontinue writing them and concentrate on what I for one think is his natural bent. Ultimately only the good poems that a man writes are worth talking about.

Merrill's good poems are musical and delicate. They have a fine open quality.

One winter morning as a child
Upon the windowpane's thin frost I drew
Forehead and eyes and mouth the clear and mild
Features of nobody I knew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And then abstracted looking through
This or that wet transparent line
Beyond beheld a winter garden so
Heavy with snow its hedge of pine. . . .

These delicate lines evoke the childhood experience perfectly. Merrill has a distinct feeling for measured verse; he works well in the formal stanza, and has affinities with a whole host of elegant British lyricists to whom all of us are permanently in debt.

Had I not agreed to review a number of books of verse for this magazine, I would very likely have missed the poems of Elizabeth Sewell, an Englishwoman who has published criticism and fiction but only a small amount of poetry. So many books of verse are published each year that one tends to pay attention only to those which receive prizes and ballyhoo. Such a system favors the writer who publishes much, the quantity of the work sometimes giving him an importance which is beyond his merit. I suspect that Miss Sewell has been somewhat reticent in getting her poems to the press and has published nothing but her best. Consequently she has only a small body of excellent verse and probably only an audience of friends waiting to buy it. This is a pity. Miss Sewell is very nearly as good as they come.

It is interesting to read what she has to say about her work. She notes in a short statement printed on the dust jacket instead of the usual blurb, that whatever unity the poems have "springs from a steadily increasing attempt on my part to see poetry not primarily as making, the creation of objets d'art, but as a means of interpreting and understanding, grasping something." This, then, is a rejection of aestheticism, and it would be surprising in the light of what she has written if it were not her view. Hers is the most serious kind of art, sloughing off all that is inconsequential and contingent, and dealing with only the most important subjects. When a writer does this, he risks himself entirely. If one tries to be profound and fails, one looks ludicrous. Nor, although technique is of secondary importance, can it be anything less than perfect in such an endeavor; high art cannot be done by fumblers. Fortunately Miss Sewell is a master craftsman. It is for this reason that she takes her craft for granted.

She identifies many of her influences, confesses that they can be found in plenty. "Some are named in title or text, e.g., Rimbaud or Saint Thomas Aquinas or Linnaeus, and I can name others, putting against specific poems the name (with gratitude) of Hölderlin, say, or Ezra Pound." But I feel in her the whole surge of English metaphysical verse. No doubt Valéry (on whom she has written at length), Yeats and other moderns have left their mark. But so also have the masters of the seventeenth century.

Like Yeats, like Rilke, like the metaphysicals, she seeks to catch the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ineffable. Since her endeavor is to penetrate the world of appearance, she is not much concerned with autobiographical detail. Metaphor for her becomes a way of trapping the elusive, not as it is for many poets a method of disguising the obvious. Her remarkable lyric "Archangels in Winter" begins as follows:

They are not as the snow,
Soft fluted, curled.
They are not as the sky,
Glacier blue.
Yet in a figure show
One knows them too,
Watching the hawks that fly
Above the world.

Implicit in this brilliant imagery is a whole philosophic system. I do not mean that Miss Sewell has written philosophy; she quite obviously hasn't. But the complete exegesis of this poem would include philosophic doctrine. For the hawks that fly above the world are the Intelligences, and the world that Miss Sewell enunciates is a world that intellect can penetrate. This is a far cry from Anne Sexton's cosmos. It is perhaps the world she wishes to find but cannot reach. (This, I must hasten to add, has nothing to do with the quality of the poetry she writes.) The last stanza of the poem goes as follows:

Their being will not fuse
With Arctic storms
Or Borealis flare
Of whites and blues:
But keen minds light the air
With intellectual forms—
Perhaps Pythagoras's square
On the hypotenuse.

The temporal and the eternal merge in this magnificent lyric; the mind discovering form is grasped by reality. The hawks have us in their talons.

But Miss Sewell's poems are all so carefully structured that they suffer from being quoted in part. Her art is difficult since it requires absolute attention by the reader to be understood. Not that she is in the least eccentric or private in her expression. Quite the contrary. A poem of hers can be read in a flash and as quickly missed because her language has not been taken seriously enough. But, as I have indicated, this is a poet to be taken seriously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GERALD WEALES

Inventing Oscar, An Unsolved Mystery

WHEN COLLECTIONS OF LETTERS FAIL—as volumes to be read, not as biographical source books—they customarily do so on one of two grounds. Either they are stylistically uninteresting or they are not revealing enough. The Wilde volume[1] has both shortcomings. Although Wilde made his literary reputation as a stylist (which seems incredible now that all his work, except the best of his plays, looks like the pastiche it plainly is), his letters have no personal stamp on them. He uses the formulae of epistolary politeness to accept or regret dinner invitations, to present or receive complimentary volumes. The best of literary men might have trouble carving gems from the laundry-list concerns of daily life, but even in his longer letters, those having to do with his work and his quarrels, Wilde runs to primness and pomposity. Renowned as a wit, he is seldom witty. At most, he is kittenish, as in his notes to Ada Leverson: "I shall be in town soon, and must come and charm the Sphinx with honey-cakes. The trouble is I left my flute in a railway carriage—and the fauns take so long to cut new reeds." In his quarrels, where wit might serve him best, he can only sound hurt; by comparison, one of Whistler's lovely, nasty letters, quoted in the footnotes, stands up and shouts for attention. When Wilde occasionally finds what he thinks is a good line, either lyric or waspish, he uses it often. "The supreme vice is shallowness" runs like a refrain through the letters of the last years. Since repetition is one of his most obvious literary characteristics (epigrams pass from the early plays to the novel, from the novel to the later plays: Robert Ross told Adela Schuster in a letter that he once played Boswell to Wilde and that Wilde took his notes and incorporated most of the good lines into the comedy he was then working on), it is not surprising that he uses lines again and again in letters which, ostensibly, are for the eyes of the recipients only.

Anyone who sits down to read the Wilde letters will know within a few pages that he is not going to find the kind of pleasure—the play of idea, word and personality—that one finds in the letters of, say, Bernard Shaw. I might have a harder time sustaining my charge that the letters are not revealing. The last two hundred pages give a vivid picture of the collapse of Wilde, show him wandering from one European city to another, living on the kindness of much abused friends, writing

[1] THE LETTERS OF OSCAR WILDE, edited by *Rupert Hart-Davis*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $15.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

endless letters describing the pretty street boys and begging for the money that will pay for their company. Petulant, hysterical, self-pitying, the Wilde of these years is a ruin, but the splendor of that ruin, to which all his friends testify, depends on our believing in the old Wilde, the successful Wilde, the outrageous Wilde; unfortunately, the letters from the early nineties are few and they do not display the peacock feathers of his days of triumph. Although it is his fall, plus the charm of decadence and the drama of the courtroom, that has made Wilde a popular subject for the stage and screen, I am much more interested in how he got to be king of the mountain from which he was pushed. It is one of the bromides of Wilde biographers that he invented himself, a cliché which is probably true, but the letters tell us no more about that process (not as much, perhaps) than does the material gathered by someone like Frances Winwar, who is mainly interested in the impact of the Oscar image. We can follow the stages of the development of Wilde in the letters, but only by implication can we guess at his consciousness of what he is doing. From the beginning, he is plainly a literary man on the make, but he is no more assiduous at it than any number of contemporary writers of my acquaintance who have failed to make it big; the elusive Wilde personality (like Harold Ross, he always sounds like a bore or a boor even when he is receiving a loving testimonial) which must have tipped the scales in his favor never emerges in his letters.

The reason perhaps is that he may never really have existed, except as a performance. We catch amusing glimpses of him: as the young Oxford poet buttering up W. E. Gladstone and Walter Pater; as the eccentric evangelist of the new art movement carefully choosing the costume which will delight and startle his American audiences; as the editor of *Woman's World* describing what he wants the magazine to be (it sounds rather like the new *McCall's*). More often, we see him looking for a job, worrying about money, mending a literary fence. Infrequently, we find him discussing his work and his ideas, but he seems to prefer the easy invocation of ART. The letters are more numerous, longer, more personal after the trials, the imprisonment, the beginning of the long, sad slide toward death, but even here Wilde is a hard man to pin down. The pain in the last letters may be real, but it is also plainly used as a tool and a weapon. "Oscar is so pathetic and such a born actor," his wife once wrote. When Constance died, Wilde wired Robert Ross, "Please come tomorrow and stay at my hotel. Am in great grief." Ross later wrote Leonard Smithers, "Oscar of course did not feel it at all." A year later, Wilde made a trip to Genoa ("to see Constance's grave. . . . It was very tragic seeing her name carved on a tomb. . . ."), but the effect of his letter to Ross, which conjures up a picture of the bereaved husband at the graveside, is a little undermined by a letter to Reginald Turner, written a few weeks later, in which he describes the Genoa trip, mentioning not Constance's grave, but an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Italian actor "whom I wildly loved" with whom he spent three days. His begging letters are called into doubt not only by Ross's insistence that he was never in real need, but also by his own occasional slips: "My dear Robbie, I am so sorry about my excuse. I had forgotten I had used Nogent before."

It is a commonplace that every man wears many masks in his life, but there is always a suspicion that somewhere there is an actual person who puts the masks on. One reaches the end of Wilde's letters surrounded by a litter of masks, most of them politic and a little dull, but with no man to wear them. Robert Ross, contemplating publishing some of Wilde's letters and considering that "his personality and conversation were far more wonderful than anything he wrote," commented that "of course it will be impossible to reproduce what is gone for ever." Reproduce? 1098 letters and one cannot even approach the man.

A note on the editing. If we were only to judge by the amount of work done, Rupert Hart-Davis would deserve an unreserved pat on the back. But the volume has two drawbacks. The first is Hart-Davis's decision to correct Wilde's spelling, rearrange his paragraphing, regularize his punctuation and his use of capitals; this may make the book more readable, but it will annoy those scholars who find significance in habitual usages and it will finally make necessary—if Wilde continues to be of importance in the history of English literature—a new and more exact edition of the letters. The second editorial difficulty lies in the kind and quantity of footnote information. The editor has made a determined effort to identify everyone to whom Wilde wrote or whom he mentioned, but the footnotes often contain material that is way off the point. To understand a letter all that one needs to know is the momentary significance to Wilde of a particular person or event. One certainly does not need to know what position of eminence a man attained or who his second wife was to be twenty years after Wilde was dead. My favorite bit of irrelevance comes in a note to an invitation of Wilde's to Minnie Simpson to take tea with Cassandra, Clytaemnestra and the Argive elders; Hart-Davis indicates that Wilde is referring to some undergraduate actors who did *Agamemnon* at Oxford, but he shovels in detail after detail about the production, topping his pile of minutiae, happily, with "George Eliot attended the last performance and died five days later." Virginia Woolf asked, after reading, footnotes and all, Walpole's letters to Cole, "Ought not the presses to have issued in a supplementary pocket a supplementary pair of eyes?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIVIAN MERCIER

Misprints on the Sands of Time[1]

ULYSSES IS THAT PARADOXICAL THING, a work of literature which casts doubt on the reliability of both the written and the printed word. For example, Leopold Bloom's presence at the funeral of Paddy Dignam is recorded in a Dublin newspaper as follows: "The mourners included . . . L. Boom. . . ." Elsewhere in the book Mr. Bloom receives a "lonely hearts" letter from an ardent but inaccurate typist who in one place writes "world" for "word." The symbolic value of this slip can scarcely be overrated, since God created the world with a word and Joyce himself created a world with words; hostile critics would say that he mistook words for the real world. (Appropriately enough, for a number of years the "standard" American edition of *Ulysses,* then replete with typos, contained the incorrect "corrected" reading "word.")

These examples, far from warning Joyce's critics not to believe all they read, send most of them careering off in the opposite direction; in their view, a writer clever enough to include deliberate misprints must have plotted his book down to the very last syllable—or letter, even. It has been maintained, for instance, that the initial letter of each of the book's three sections (S, M, P) stands for one of the three principal characters (Stephen, Molly, Poldy-Leopold). If you ask me, they may just as well stand for the Holy Ghost, the Virgin Mary and the Father (*Spiritus Sanctus, Maria, Pater*); perhaps some ingenious reader can help me explain why the Son has been omitted.

Robert M. Adams, author of *Strains of Discord: Studies in Literary Openness,* a book which raises claustrophobia to the status of a principle, characteristically refuses to accept this view of *Ulysses* as a hermetically sealed symbolic construct. While he concedes that many of the seemingly naturalistic details in the novel are included not merely for their own sakes but as multi-suggestive symbols, he undertakes to prove that many others appear for the sake of mere surface verisimilitude. For example, a list of contestants in a bicycle race at Trinity College, Dublin (who, by the way, Mr. Adams, are careering round the track in College Park, not dodging through the traffic in College Green), contains the name J. A. Jackson. "To at least one alert student of *Ulysses,*" writes Mr. Adams, "this name has seemed to conceal a reference to the author himself, James Augustine, son of

[1] SURFACE AND SYMBOL: THE CONSISTENCY OF JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES,* by *Robert M. Adams.* Oxford University Press. $6.75. THE DUBLIN DIARY OF STANISLAUS JOYCE, edited by *George Harris Healey.* Cornell University Press. $3.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jack Joyce." It so happens that all the Dublin daily papers for June 17, 1904, agree that J. A. Jackson won that particular race, and that his closest competitors were the three other men listed by Joyce. In another race, Joyce listed all the names correctly except that for "J. B. Jones" he gave "J. B. Jeffs." Now, Mr. Adams has discovered that "the *Irish Independent* tried to print the fifth-place finisher's name properly . . . , but their type was dirty, and the result looks remarkably like 'Jeffs.' Joyce evidently copied it in that form. . . ."

The names of the racers, then, are surface rather than symbol; other details are symbol rather than surface; yet others, when Joyce is at his best, "present both a solid surface and a luminous symbol. . . ." In examining *Ulysses* from this standpoint, Mr. Adams has not merely directed attention to a number of individual cruxes in the interpretation of *Ulysses;* he has spotlighted the crux of cruxes. Someone like myself, who has lived many years in Dublin, is so overwhelmed by the familiar details in *Ulysses* that at first he cannot see the wood for the trees; on the other hand, the typical American graduate student, for whom Dublin lies on the sea-coast of Bohemia, cannot see the trees for the wood—the Sacred Wood or Baudelaire's *forêt de symboles.* Undoubtedly the true view of *Ulysses* lies somewhere between these extremes, and Mr. Adams gets as close to it as any commentator on the book has ever managed to.

In his most interesting and useful chapter, Mr. Adams employs the methods of both the scholar and the "private eye" to discover many of the sources of Joyce's erudition. He knows exactly how often Joyce visited Marsh's Library (twice), how many volumes of Joachim of Flora he consulted there (one), and just what prophecy he quoted in part from Joachim (the first). But Mr. Adams also finds that while much of the scholarly lore attributed to Stephen in *Ulysses* is astonishingly accurate, much of it is just as startlingly wrong. The errors in arithmetic made by Joyce in his own person as narrator of the "Ithaca" episode are presumably inadvertent; Mr. Adams assumes, however, that Joyce was aware of most of the errors attributed to Stephen. I wonder. The novelist pursues an end totally different from the scholar's in any case, but when Joyce aimed merely to supply information, as in the lectures delivered in Italy and translated for *Critical Essays,* he produced a mish-mash of fact, surmise and plain misinformation. Three years spent cutting classes at a second-rate college may provide splendid training for the future novelist, but they hardly offer a solid foundation for mature scholarship.

On the other hand, I heartily agree with Mr. Adams when he writes that ". . . the meaningless is deeply interwoven with the meaningful in the texture of the novel," or that *Ulysses* ". . . does not make a neat allegorical pattern. It does not make a self-contained construct. It never will." Yet we would both admit that *Ulysses* is one of the most carefully constructed and meaning-full books ever written. However, "be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sides being an ingenious, intricate pattern, it is a cataclysmic plunge into the black pit of the self, into the darkness of the inarticulate." Mr. Adams' chief evidence for this conclusion consists of the note-sheets found among Joyce's manuscripts for *Ulysses,* which include "small free-association patterns" and represent, at least in part, "a stage of inchoate mind-exploration."

Although the naive equation of Stephen with Joyce has been refuted, *Ulysses* still retains a confessional aspect, in which Joyce-as-Bloom bulks larger than Joyce-as-Stephen, while Joyce-as-Joyce hovers overhead. Mr. Adams sees all this, but apparently misses the full significance of Stephen's lecture on Shakespeare in the National Library: there Stephen argues that Shakespeare is the Ghost rather than Hamlet, but John Eglinton corrects him, saying, "He is the ghost and the prince. He is all in all"; Stephen accepts the correction, and goes on to say, "In *Cymbeline,* in *Othello* he is bawd and cuckold." It follows, therefore, that Joyce is Bloom rather than Stephen, though ultimately he may indeed be all in all—Molly Bloom, Blazes Boylan, the Citizen and Pisser Burke to boot. The young Joyce, according to Herbert Gorman, expressed contempt for Oscar Wilde because the latter revealed so little of his true self in *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* The mature Joyce avoided Wilde's sin of omission, but we have to read "Scylla and Charybdis" very carefully in order to realize that he tried to put all of himself into *Ulysses.*

Since Mr. Adams has avoided so many of the traps into which the over-readers dive rather than fall, I was dismayed to see him fumble badly over the literal sense on at least one occasion. He writes, "For ten years now (as we learn on pp. 720-21) she [Molly Bloom] has been deprived of all sexual contact with her husband. . . ." It's a poor excuse to say that countless other Joyceans have misread the same passage in the same way, for Mr. Adams is making a conscious effort to read more literally as well as more carefully than they. Whether one turns to p. 721 of the bad old Modern Library edition or to p. 736 of the new one, the crucial words are the same: ". . . there remained a period of 10 years, 5 months and 18 days during which carnal intercourse had been incomplete, without ejaculation of semen within the natural female organ." Plainly we are to understand that the Blooms have been practising *coitus interruptus.* (Molly: "the last time he came on my bottom," line 7 of p. 725 in the old edition or line 8 of p. 740 in the new.) Molly's complete satisfaction is denied her by Bloom's unskillful practice of this method of birth-control, but she does not share the misapprehension of many characters in *Ulysses*—and, apparently, of most of its readers—that her husband is impotent. ("to make his micky stand for him," p. 765, lines 25-6, old ed., or p. 780, line 21, new ed.) I fear Mr. Adams has given up reading *Ulysses* straight through, as a novel should be re-read, and has come to rely more and more on Miles L. Hanley's *Word Index to . . . Ulysses.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Dublin Diary of Stanislaus Joyce, as edited by George Harris Healey from the manuscript in the Cornell University Library, is both too little and too late. Too little in that—at the behest of its British publisher, I assume—several passages have been omitted, "most of them because they lacked interest, the rest because they were libellous or otherwise offensive." (Amusingly, one of the "offensive" passages occurs in full in Mr. Adams' book.) Too late, because the most interesting biographical material in it has already been used by Richard Ellmann in his *James Joyce* or by Stanislaus himself in *My Brother's Keeper.* There are, however, two passages new to me which raise Stanislaus higher in my esteem than he already stood. One is the critical essay comparing George Meredith and Henry James as novelists (pp. 83-93). My favorite straw man, the American graduate student, will utterly fail to understand how a boy of not quite twenty, who had never been to college, could have read and understood so much of James and Meredith, let alone have seen James's superiority and expressed it with such clarity and, at times, wit. If Stanislaus had had his brother's opportunities, he would have made both a better critic and a better scholar than the envied "Jim."

The other passage, on pp. 108-110, presents Stanislaus' thoughts as he lies in bed with a sprained ankle and drifts off to sleep. Mr. Healey says in a footnote that this passage "is considered" (he does not say by whom) "to be one of several sources for James's use of the interior monologue." However, if Stanislaus invented the style of *Ulysses,* he certainly did not invent that of *Finnegans Wake.* When on p. 61 one reads of O'Connell Street, "deserted but for a few people and a cat nimbling quietly along, the horse walking," it is not hard to identify the author of this nimble prose: either an anonymous compositor or Mr. George Harris Healey. If Mr. Healey takes another look at the MS., I wager he'll find there "a cab ambling [rumbling?] . . . along," and the mysterious horse will then be pulling the cab. My suspicion that Mr. Healey has been misled by Stanislaus' handwriting arose because of the equally mysterious composer "Waltenfel" who occurs twice on p. 103, where we are told that he has written one or two waltzes. I assume that Stanislaus actually wrote "Walteufel" and was referring to Émile Waldteufel (1837-1915), an Alsatian composer noted for his waltzes.

If James Joyce was in fact aware of all that is fake in Stephen's erudition, just what would that prove? It might indicate simply that Stephen himself was a fake or it might show, further, that Stephen and Bloom resemble each other in the inaccuracy of their information as well as in other, more obvious ways; it might, finally, suggest that all human learning is but a tissue of misunderstandings. *Finnegans Wake* treats the half-remembered half-truths from grade-school history books which many of us mistake for historical truth as being on a par with the most carefully considered utterances of the most scientific historians. Ulti-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mately, Joyce hints, a passionately believed myth has more chance of affecting human actions and thus becoming "true" than has the most objective and best documented piece of research. Perhaps *Ulysses* makes substantially the same point.

It is to another, though related, point that we scholars and critics must pay heed, however: if every phrase of Stephen's erudition was fake and yet sounded convincing or at least "in character," we have Aristotle's warranty that Joyce need not be any the less a great poet; on the other hand, if *our* facts and *our* interpretations prove equally flimsy, we may forfeit the right to be considered scholars or critics at all.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

The Monster as Photographer

WHAT A MONSTER IS THE ARTIST—that is, a man who dedicates himself to constructing works of art, and who believes that a great work of art is the highest of all things made and that making one is the highest of all occupations. When The Artist has purged himself of vanity and doubt, like Joyce, like Edward Weston, then he is monstrous indeed, for then he is wholly justified. The religion of art is like Calvinism: in both, the elect are known by their works but are justified by their faith, by their very being.

Let Tolstoy and Van Gogh represent another sort of artist. Both of them elevated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into the ranks of important art, an error of judgment The Artist would be incapable of making. But they saw true art as efficacious in revealing the unknown or instructing to virtue, and the efficacy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been demonstrated unmistakably. They saw an artist as important, first as any man is important, then as he succeeds in making a work of art which creates a communion among those who admire it. They were concerned to save us, to help us save ourselves. They despised The Artist, some of whose works they could not help admiring.

Let Poe's tales and poems be the blazon of The Artist. Baudelaire to Valéry—the theorists of The Artist made him their own. His work was in every way inferior to theirs, yet it was the emblem they reared—an error of judgment Tolstoy or Van Gogh could not have made. Like Poe, they defined themselves against: social involvement, religious belief, art as communion. They created a mirror cult, that is, a cult of self-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

consciousness, a cult in which things are reversed. In that reversed religion, The Artist is a saint: Rimbaud a martyred saint, Picasso an heroic saint. Now that The Scientist has lost his capital letters and is becoming one of the boys, has joined the commissars, generals, executives, and engineers, we may be in for a bad stretch during which The Artist is worshipped uncontended. What this means in effect is more and more beat bohemians, mescaline mystics, self-regarding phoneys. This very worship, one can hope, will help to end The Artist; any new giant capable of becoming a true Artist-Hero will also be too fastidious to endure being slobbered on by the ready-made cultists, who are now too numerous to escape.

Edward Weston was The Artist as photographer. To be sure, in the advanced regions of art criticism, still photography has no status as an art, though the photography of cinema is deemed worthy of discussion. Unbelievable nonsense, if it is on canvas, is exhibited for sale, discussed seriously, and hung in museums; whereas books or exhibitions of photography are not discussed in the advanced intellectual journals, and only one important museum in the country has a permanent exhibition of even the best photographs by even the acknowledged masters.[1] A chic attitude toward photography is that it removed a tiresome burden from painting, the burden of representing the visible world as it appears; such representation being held irrelevant to true art, photography is suspect just because it does suggest the visible world better than any other medium. It is likewise chic to suppose that, because a photograph is the result of a mechanical process, it is not also the result of an artist's creating.

One remedy for such snobbery is looking at good photographs. Weston records such a conversion. A woman arranged a meeting between him and a man who, unknown to Weston, hated photography and photographers.

> Finally, deadlocked in our differences, I opened the portfolio to prove a point. The first two prints were enough, he retracted everything, he capitulated absolutely. His admiration was deep, enthusiastic, sincere: he proved one of the keenest critics I have met lately, thanking me for having changed his attitude. Once he said, "Anyone seeing that line and recording it could have done great things in any art!"

Another remedy for the notion that photography is an inconsiderable art is to read Weston's *Daybooks,* for in them he reveals himself as being so austerely The Artist, and his intelligence and honesty are so

[1] The George Eastman House in Rochester, N. Y., under the direction of Beaumont and Nancy Newhall. Mrs. Newhall edited the first volume of THE DAYBOOKS OF EDWARD WESTON, published by The George Eastman House at $10. Another volume will be published when it is prepared. She was also appointed by Weston as his official biographer, and is working on the biography.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

considerable, that it is not conceivable he would have wasted his time on a mechanical frippery. He was a relentless self-critic, and strove for and sometimes attained perfection. He took, and preserved with formidable consistency, the aesthetic view of things: it was the form that counted, no matter what object embodied the form, whether a green pepper, a nude woman, or a toilet bowl; when he caught the face of a man in sudden action, he sought the moment of revelation, not because the truth would be revealed so much as because at that moment the face would make the most beautiful image. He was against religion, puritanism, respectability in dress and play; he was indifferent to civic responsibility; he was for free love, primitives, Art. In his life he subordinated everything to his pure dedication to his photography, to himself as image-maker. Here is a passage which suggests something of his quality.

> Morning came clear and brilliant. "I will do some heads of you today, Zinnia." The Mexican sun, I thought, will reveal everything. Some of the tragedy of our present life may be captured, nothing can be hidden under this cloudless cruel sky. She leaned against a white-washed wall. I drew close . . . and kissed her. A tear rolled down her cheek—and then I captured forever the moment.
>
> Let me see, f. 8—1/10 sec. K I filter, panchromatic film—how mechanical and calculated it sounds, yet really how spontaneous and genuine, for I have so overcome the mechanics of my camera that it functions responsive to my desires. My shutter coordinating with my brain is released in a way as natural as I might move my arm.

Is this not The Artist's mirror world, self-conscious and reversed? His mistress is sad. He kisses her—and then, so perfectly is his camera a part of him, he inserts it between. The photograph he made on that occasion is stunning. To us who look at it only as a picture in a book, its beauty is moving. But a chill seizes me to learn that at the moment when he might have consoled her, have wept with her, he instead took her picture. Why then? Because no model could have generated an expression of woe so genuine, so valuable for his art. Is this not the authentic monster's uncommuning coldness of heart?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

B. H. HAGGIN

Composers and Critics

MUCH OF WHAT STRAVINSKY, talking ostensibly in answer to questions of Robert Craft, has to say in his three volumes of conversations—about music, about the now historic artistic events he observed or was involved in, about the famous persons who were involved in them with him—is fascinating, revealing him as one of the artists who are perceptive and articulate about their art, and as the possessor of a powerful mind that tends to go in unexpected directions, a sharp eye for human character and behavior, a grim sense of humor, a gift of pungent statement. Thus, jazz "has nothing to do with composed music and when it seeks to be influenced by contemporary music it isn't jazz and it isn't good." Or, "Translation changes the character of a [musical] work and destroys its cultural unity." Or, "Rimsky's Meyerbeerization of Musorgsky's 'technically imperfect' music could not longer be tolerated." Or, "I would like to admit all Strauss operas to whichever purgatory punishes triumphant banality." Or a composer's "good intentions have got to be paved with Hell." Or Nijinsky's face "could become the most powerful actor's mask I have ever seen, and as Petrushka he was the most exciting human being I have ever seen on the stage."

But reading Stravinsky's statement that Nijinsky's choreography for *Le Sacre du Printemps* was unsuited to the music and represented Nijinsky's ignorance of music and of its proper relation to movement, one remembers that it is contradicted by what Emile Vuillermoz, Jacques Rivière and André Levinson wrote at the time about Nijinsky's achievement. And it may be that the composer could see only "rhythmic chaos" where the critic—in this instance Levinson—saw that "in their simplified gymnastics the dancers express the respective duration and force of the sounds; they bend their knees and straighten them again, they raise their heels and fall back on them, they stamp in place, insistently marking the accented notes. . . . An all-powerful constraint dominates them, disjoints their limbs, lies heavy on the necks of their bent heads." There is no way of knowing today whether Stravinsky or Levinson is right about Nijinsky's *Sacre;* and I cite the disagreement merely to illustrate the important fact that Stravinsky, looking through the lenses of his practice, his attitudes, his interests of a doer in his art, often sees something the non-doer does not see.

1 CONVERSATIONS WITH IGOR STRAVINSKY (1959), $4.00; MEMORIES AND COMMENTARIES (1960), $3.95; EXPOSITIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS (1962), $4.95. By *Igor Stravinsky* and *Robert Craft.* Doubleday. A WORKING FRIENDSHIP: the Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Translated by *Hanns Hammelmann* and *Ewald Osers.* Random House. $10.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thus, for Stravinsky as a doer his recent *Movements* is made interesting and valuable by the doing in it—by the fact that "every aspect of the composition was guided by serial forms, the sixes, the quadrilaterals, triangles, etc. The fifth movement . . . uses a construction of twelve verticals. The gamma and delta hexachords in this movement are more important than the A and B, too. Five orders are rotated instead of four, with six alternates for each of the five, while, at the same time, the six work in all directions, as though through a crystal." All this, for him, makes *Movements* as interesting and valuable as the doing in *Le Baiser de la Fée* makes that piece; and there are other people, certainly, who feel the same. "When I compose something I use the language of music, and my statement in my grammar will be clear to the musician who has followed music up to where my contemporaries and I have brought it"; and certainly, for those who have been able to follow music to that point, the doing in *Movements* makes it as interesting and valuable as the doing in *Le Baiser* makes that piece, and Stravinsky's description of it is as intelligible as the piece itself. But certainly these people are few; and for the majority of non-doing listeners who have not been able to follow music to where Stravinsky and his contemporaries have brought it, *Movements* makes no musical sense and Stravinsky's description of its construction is equally unintelligible. And this is true of the other recent and contemporary works that Stravinsky talks about in these volumes.

Nor is it only new music that Stravinsky looks at through those lenses that cause him to see what the non-doer does not see. His doer's interest in the manner of doing, and his own practice in doing, cause him to hear that "Berlioz's basses are sometimes uncertain and the inner harmonic voices unclear. The problem of orchestral distribution is therefore insurmountable, and balance is regulated superficially, by dynamics"—a defect for Stravinsky, whose practice is to write intrinsic and automatic balance into the scoring.[2] But the basses, the inner harmonic voices, the orchestral balance regulated by dynamics don't trouble the non-doer listening to Berlioz's music. Nor is he troubled by what makes the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth, for Stravinsky, "a late and terrible example" of Beethoven's frequent lapses into banality: "such quadrilateral phrase-building and pedantic development (of Bars 387-400), such poor rhythmic invention . . . , and such patently false pathos."

So with performance. For a composer of new music the only good performers are the few who "have attained new instrumental and musical powers through their performances of new music"; and Boulez and Maderna, because as composers they have performed new music, are "the conductors today who have most advanced the techniques

[2] But I heard Stravinsky, at a rehearsal of *Le Baiser de la Fée,* say to the Boston Symphony basses: "Stronger. You are covered by the trombones, but I don't want to touch the trombones," and repeat the passage, in which now the basses were not covered by the untouched trombones.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of conducting (communication between musicians)." Indeed, their involvement with new music makes composers the most interesting conductors of any music, "for the reason that they are the only ones who can have a really new insight into music itself"; and for Stravinsky with his interest in the composer's doing there is another reason for finding composers—for example Mahler—to be the best conductors even of older music: their performances exhibit the understanding of the way music is put together, which conductors who are only conductors don't have.

One thinks of Toscanini's beautifully articulated performances of Beethoven that were achieved without the new powers and insights derived from new music; but Stravinsky reports hearing in the recorded performance of Beethoven's First that Toscanini's *allegro* for the first movement was "an absurdly fast Rossini-like tempo that obliterated phrase accents and articulations"; and "Toscanini's ambition throughout the movement seems to have been to create climaxes, whether or not they coincided with Beethoven's own climaxes and, especially, Beethoven's own scale of climax. The second movement was also badly played. At one place in the development section the strings performed strict thirty-second notes after dotted notes. Then, a few bars later, the winds doubly shortened these thirty-seconds (as indeed they were right so to do). The strings, hearing themselves corrected, followed suit in the next statement of this rhythm. But can Toscanini have failed to hear such a thing? In any case, he did not hear that the *ritardando* he applied to the beginning of the recapitulation was insufferably gross." This caused me to listen again to the performance on RCA Victor LM-6009 or 6901, in which I heard that the tempo of the first movement was suited to the character of the music and not too fast for the phrase accents and articulations to be all clearly audible, and that the climaxes were the ones in Beethoven's score and in right scale. As for the second movement, I found a passage such as Stravinsky describes not in the development section but in measures 42-49 of the exposition; and what became clear was not only the fact that Toscanini had instructed the winds and strings to shorten the thirty-seconds and thus to sharpen the rhythm in the second four measures, but his reason for so instructing them (which it is astonishing that Stravinsky didn't perceive): the energetic character of those four measures, marked *f*, as against the quiet first four, marked *p*. And I heard no *ritardando* at the beginning of the recapitulation.

And so with criticism, which Stravinsky not only comments on briefly in the earlier volumes but devotes an appendix to in the latest volume. Critics are incompetent because "they do not see how a musical phrase is constructed, do not know how music is written; they are incompetent in the technique of the contemporary musical language." That is, competence in writing about music, for Stravinsky, consists in knowing what the contemporary composer knows; and he suggests in the ap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pendix that the composers oppose to the ignorance of "the journalist-reviewer pest" a new magazine that will be "a composers'—i.e. a professional—review." But what criticism calls for is not the knowledge of the composer, the doer, the insider, but rather the perception, the judgment, the taste of the non-doer, the outsider—i.e. the listener. And what the composer writes as a doer, an insider, is likely to be intelligible, interesting and valid for other composers and a few performers and listeners who share his special interest and viewpoint, but not for the majority of non-professional listeners for whom the critic writes as a professional listener. We have seen that some of Stravinsky's writing in these volumes provides an illustration of this; and I have found another in a few articles a reader sent me that were written by the new critic of *The Nation*, a composer named Benjamin Boretz. Whether he discusses contemporary works, or old works and their performances—the weaknesses of Schubert's C-major Symphony, with respect to which Furtwängler's recorded performance is good; the strengths of Beethoven's Eighth, with respect to which Wallenstein's concert performance was bad; the characteristics of Mendelssohn's writing, with respect to which several Klemperer performances are exemplary—my experience of what he is talking about (including a new look at the Schubert and Beethoven scores) doesn't enable me to recognize what he describes in the music or to accept his evaluations of the performances. And I would suppose that his *Nation* readers got no more from the writing than I.

And actually what makes the two critics whom Stravinsky denounces in his appendix contemptible is not their lack of the composer's knowledge he thinks necessary, but initially their deficiencies of critical perception, judgment and taste. In Winthrop Sargeant's writing these deficiencies appear not in his rejection of Stravinsky's recent works but in his boredom with the earlier Stravinsky works that are twentieth-century classics, and on the other hand in his enthusiasm over Menotti, Giannini, Carlisle Floyd and Douglas Moore. And I call these deficiencies initial because Sargeant exhibits others in addition—among them a lack of intellectual rigor. His mind has developed enormous proficiency in coming up with whatever will achieve momentary advantage or escape momentary difficulty in a discussion; so that when Stravinsky attacks him with the statement that "[Sargeant's] giants are Giannini, Jello Doio, Gian Carlo, etc.; his dwarfs are Schönberg and myself," Sargeant's way of parrying this is to assure Stravinsky that he "does not find the present world of musical composition to be generally populated by giants, and he regards Mr. Stravinsky, by comparison with his contemporaries, as a giant of a pretty fair stature"—under cover of which he says nothing about his overestimation of Menotti, Giannini and the rest. This is for readers of *The New Yorker* of March 3, who he must hope will not see the April issue of *Show*, with an article written some months earlier in which Sargeant describes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stravinsky as one who covers his "lack of creative capacity" with his "master[y] of the artificialities of music," such as orchestration, and predicts that the only works that are likely to survive are things like *Pulcinella* and *Le Baiser de la Fée,* "largely because the[ir] basic inspiration . . . is not Stravinsky's own. They are . . . Stravinsky orchestrations of music written in the style of others." For Sargeant "even that most famous of all musical conversation pieces, 'Le Sacre du Printemps,' is beginning to sound dated." (*Petrushka* apparently isn't even worth mentioning; and the deficiency even in mere perception appears in the fact that listening to *Le Baiser de la Fée*—in which one hears the Stravinsky mind in characteristic operation on the Tchaikovsky fragments that it transforms and fits together with materials of his own—Sargeant hears only a "Stravinsky orchestration of music written in the style of [Tchaikovsky].")

As for Paul Henry Lang, this man who is confident of the critical powers that he believes, erroneously, only a scholar's knowledge can provide is actually unperceptive enough to hear that "Stravinsky . . . is not the best conductor of his own works," and ignorant enough to add that in the performance of *Movements* "the top-notch musicians . . . needed only the first beat to make their own way"—which Stravinsky rightly calls vicious nonsense, pointing out that "no orchestra in the world can make 'its own way' through even five measures of my *Movements* . . . and only a very skillful conductor can manage the piece at all." And Lang's deficiencies in judgment and taste are evident in, among other things, the statements about Gesualdo that create, in Stravinsky's words, "the mystery of how anyone with even rudimentary musical background could write so stupidly about such obvious questions." Moreover, with Lang too there are additional deficiencies. For one thing there is the confusion of mind that expressed itself with characteristic aggressiveness in the outpouring of incoherent pontifical pronouncement that was Lang's review of the first volume of the Stravinsky-Craft conversations. Stravinsky replies to some of the statements in the review with understandable fury, but he is strangely silent about one which—in the light of what we know about Stravinsky—was not only grotesquely improbable but highly offensive: the contention, which Lang kept repeating without once citing an example, that in these conversations Stravinsky was little more than a ventriloquist's dummy speaking what a sinister Robert Craft contrived, with his loaded questions, to get him to speak.[3] And in Lang's review there were also the

[3] Just as the appendix was not Stravinsky's reaction merely to "the most temperate dissent by a critic," as Lang contended in his reply in the *Herald Tribune* of March 11, so Stravinsky's enraged telegram to the paper after Lang's review of *The Flood* in June was his reaction to Lang's continuing offensive statements about Stravinsky's association with Craft. Thus, in his March 11 article Lang wrote: "In a special appendix, Mr. Stravinsky and/or Mr. Craft (by now the collaboration has reached a stage where Mr. Stravinsky should use the business designation 'A Division of Craft Products Inc.') launches a hysterical attack etc." In this article Lang deplored

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

atrocious writing and the personal nastiness that Stravinsky speaks of as things that make Lang worse than Sargeant.

It has been interesting, finally, to observe the reactions to the appendix on criticism. For it wasn't only Lang who, professedly "more in sorrow than in anger," deplored it as "unworthy of a great artist." Even Arthur Berger, a devoted admirer of Stravinsky, feared "that attention may be deflected from the really illuminating passages" of the book by "a sensational attack" which he referred to also as a "descent into polemic." Both men were speaking out of an experience in which no composer had ever done anything of this kind, and it had therefore come to be considered not a proper thing for a composer—or for anyone else—to do. Many years ago Bernard Shaw contended that "musical criticisms, like sermons, are of low average quality simply because they are never discussed or contradicted," and advocated setting up a "vigilance committee of musicians for the exposure of incompetent critics"; but musicians continued to be silent. And, as the Strauss-Hofmannsthal correspondence shows, this was not because the occasion and desire to speak were lacking.

To those who value the operas Strauss composed to the librettos of Hofmannsthal the correspondence is interesting mostly for what it reveals of the joint operation that produced those works. But to those who care nothing about the operas, the correspondence is fascinating for what it reveals about the two men, for what they say about the greats of their time—e.g. Bruno Walter, Max Reinhardt, Diaghilev, Nijinsky—with whom their activities involved them, and for what they report of the private operations in their world of artistic creation—the maneuvering with and about royal ministers, directors of the royal opera companies, conductors, singers, designers—that led up to what in the end was presented to the public in the opera house. And one of the objects of the maneuvering is the press—the "stupid, uncomprehending Berlin press" that Strauss refers to, the "newspaper louts" and *"canaille"* that Hofmannsthal speaks of. Quite possibly they would feel angry contempt even for a competent and disinterested critic who scrupulously considered nothing beyond the work that was presented

Stravinsky's insulting garbling of his name in the appendix, but himself referred to Stravinsky's "amanuensis, Robert Anton Schindler Craft," who put to "the great composer . . . questions, some straight, some leading, some loaded," and whom Lang described as "the 'ventriloquist of God' "—one who "makes Mr. Stravinsky concern himself with matters a great composer should leave to his musical accountants." That "makes" continued the view of Craft as dominating Stravinsky and being the real author of their books—the view that appeared again in Lang's concluding sentence: "I am afraid that when these controversial volumes are finished we may discover that what protrudes from Mr. Craft's head is not Mephistophelian horns, as once suspected, but donkey's ears." And in his review of *The Flood* Lang's offensiveness reached a climax in his references to "the direction of the venerable maestro himself and his amanuensis, librettist, and *valet de chambre,* Robert Craft." It was the personal nastiness in all this that elicited the rage in Stravinsky's telegram, and the phrase which described the review as "suppurating with gratuitous malice."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to him but who reported that he didn't like it. But some of the critics they hate are *not* competent, disinterested and scrupulous: the powerful Julius Korngold of the Vienna *Neue Freie Presse* not only was a pompously stupid critic but shamelessly misused his position in the interest of his composer son—one such misuse being his campaign against Strauss as co-director and principal conductor of the Vienna Opera. Such stupidity and unscrupulousness are no less a proper subject of discussion when they appear in criticism than when they appear anywhere else; and certainly their victims are entitled to speak out about them; but although Strauss exclaims indignantly once: "Must one really take all this nonsense lying down?" he and Hofmannsthal speak about it only in private and are silent in public. With the Vienna premiere of their version of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* at hand, Hofmannsthal writes of Korngold's "systematic campaign to undermine every single thing you do and so eventually poison your existence in Vienna and drive you away," and fears that he "might easily turn the scale against a work so delicate and unusual as this Molière with your music." But he attempts only a private maneuver: he tries to persuade the *Neue Freie Presse* that the work calls for review by the drama critic as well as the music critic, calculating that if the drama critic writes about the dramatic aspect Korngold will be unable "to discredit, in his perfidious way, the whole piece through an attack on the libretto (not, at first sight, directed against you [Strauss] at all), and so to destroy its success in the theatre." And the reason for the public silence comes out in the letter in which Hofmannsthal advises Strauss, who is considering an open break with the Munich Court Opera, not to get into a "theatre quarrel—where regrettably the artist has always, always the worst of it against the officials," or into a "newspaper squabble in which by virtue merely of their office the officials must inevitably prevail." That is, in a dispute with a critic it would again be the critic who by virtue of his office—i.e. his control of the printed page—would prevail in this instance and be able to take his revenge on the next work.

Fear, then, has imposed public silence on the composers and performers who have raged in private over what they have endured at the hands of horrors like Henry Krehbiel, Olin Downes, Noel Straus, Jerome Bohm, Irving Kolodin, and now Harold Schonberg and Lang. And Stravinsky has acted with unprecedented courage. Probably he too would denounce even a competent and scrupulous critic who liked *Le Baiser de la Fée* and disliked *Movements*. But he isn't angered only by the criticisms of his own works; and the critics he denounces—Sargeant for his writing about Menotti and the rest; Lang for his writing about Gesualdo and for his personal nastiness—he is right in denouncing. His action deserves the gratitude of his fellow musicians and the admiration of all of us.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AUTHORS

Adams, Robert Martin: Fiction Chronicle (review) 420
Asher, Aaron: Honorable Wounds (review) 303
Bennett, Joseph: The Destruction of the Lucanians 282
Bewley, Marius: Problems of the Literary Biographer (review) ... 143
Northern Saints and Southern Knights (review) 431
Blattner, H. W.: Sound of a Drunken Drummer (story) 365
Bly, Robert: Five Poems 76
Rewriting vs. Translation (review) 469
Bratt, Christina (with Robert Bly): *Translations from Gunnar Ekelöf* 546
Casseres, Isabel: She with a Missing Finger (verse) 49
Cioran, E. M.: A Bouquet of Heads 491
Cruttwell, Patrick: From Donne to Yeats (review) 451
Fiction Chronicle (review) 589
De Mott, Benjamin: How to Write a College Novel 243
The Little Red Discount House 551
Dimock, G. E., Jr.: On Translating Greek Comedy (review) 306
Donoghue, Denis: God on Chevauchee (review) 154
Elliott, George P.: The Monster as Photographer (review) 627
Foster, Richard: The Poetics of Selfhood (review) 149
Garrigue, Jean: 'Thy Love Is One Thou'st Not Yet Known' (verse) .. 525
Gifford, Henry: Seven Paragraphs on Antonio Machado 212
Gold, Herbert: One Sunday Morning at the Russian Bath (story) 15
Haggin, B. H.: Ballet and Music Chronicles 128, 260, 573
Composers and Critics (review) 630
Hall, Donald: An American in an Essex Village (verse) 235
Halpern, Martin: The Osprey (verse) 239
Hecht, Anthony: Shades of Keats and Marvell 50
Hemley, Cecil: Onward and Upward (review) 314
A Return to Reality (review) .. 612
Holland, Norman N.: Dangerous Disconnections 123
Shakespearean Tragedy and Psychoanalytic Criticism 217
Film, Metafilm and Un-Film .. 406
Holloway, John: Two Poems 82
Holmes, John: Verses in a Very Old Tradition 533
Howe, Irving: T. E. Lawrence: The Problem of Heroism 333
Kirstein, Lincoln: Five Poems 504
Kramer, Hilton: Art Chronicle 413
Kumin, Maxine W.: Six Poems 43
Levine, Paul: American Bards and Liberal Reviewers 91
The Season's Difference (review) 598
Lowell, Robert: *Poetry and Meter* (review) 317
Maddow, Ben: In a Cold Hotel (story) 169
Christmas in Another Skin (story) 534
Mercier, Vivian: Misprints on the Sands of Time (review) 623
Meredith, William: Fables about Error (verse) 79
Merrill, James: Annie Hill's Grave (verse) 241
Morse, J. Mitchell: Fiction Chronicle (review) 291
The Contemplative Life According to Samuel Beckett 512
Mudrick, Marvin: Colette and Strether 110
The Possibility of Criticism (review) 439
Murray, Philip: Two Poems 531
Palmer, Winthrop: Our United States (verse) 242
Sale, Roger: Novels and Being a Novelist (review) 134
The Old Apologists (review) .. 476
Doctors at Sea (review) 605
Schneider, Franz: Two Poems 88
Seidel, Frederick: The Sickness (verse) 38
Sexton, Anne: Four Poems 228
Simon, John: Theatre Chronicles 114, 264, 565
More Brass Than Enduring (review) 455

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Simpson, Louis: The Troika (verse) 90
Stafford, William: Two Poems 84
Summers, Hollis: Seven Occasions for Song (verse) 86
Swenson, May: Three Poems 544
Tomlinson, Charles: Versions from Antonio Machado 197
Vliet, R. G.: Two Poems 237
Wagoner, David: Three Poems 527
Wain, John: London Letters .. 253, 586
Watkins, Vernon: Movement of Autumn (verse) 331
Weales, Gerald: Inventing Oscar, An Unsolved Mystery (review) 620
Witt, Harold: Two Poems 72
Young, Vernon: Of Night, Fire and Water 274
Kinds of Loving in the International Film 578

BOOKS REVIEWED

Advice to a Prophet, by Richard Wilbur: *John Simon* 455
The Age of Happy Problems, by Herbert Gold: *Roger Sale*..... 605
All My Pretty Ones, by Anne Sexton: *Cecil Hemley* 612
Another Country, by James Baldwin: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
An Anthology of Spanish Poetry, edited by Angel Flores: *Robert Bly* 469
Aristophanes: Birds; Acharnians; Clouds; Frogs, trans. by William Arrowsmith, Douglass Parker and Richmond Lattimore: *G. E. Dimock, Jr.* 306
Assays, by Kenneth Rexroth: *Marvin Mudrick* 439
Between Mars and Venus, by Robert Conquest: *John Simon* 455
Big Sur, by Jack Kerouac: *Paul Levine* 598
Billiards at Half-Past Nine, by Heinrich Boll: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
Border Country, by Raymond Williams: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
The Boy from Iowa, by Reed Whittemore: *John Simon* 455
Catch-22, by Joseph Heller: *Roger Sale* 134
The Charted Mirror, by John Holloway: *Marvin Mudrick* 439
Chronique, by St. John Perse, trans. by Robert Fitzgerald: *Cecil Hemley* 314
Collected Poems, by Hugh MacDiarmid: *John Simon* 455
The Colossus, by Sylvia Plath: *John Simon* 455
Concretions, by Arlene Zekowski: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
Contemporaries, by Alfred Kazin: *Marvin Mudrick* 439
The Continuity of American Poetry, by Roy Harvey Pearce: *Richard Foster* 149
Conversations with Igor Stravinsky, by Robert Craft: *B. H. Haggin* .. 630
Curtmantle, by Christopher Fry: *Denis Donoghue* 154
David Knudsen, by George P. Elliott: *Aaron Asher* 303
The Daybooks of Edward Weston, edited by Beaumont and Nancy Newhall: *George P. Elliott* 627
Deaths for the Ladies, by Norman Mailer: *John Simon* 455
Dialogues, by Stanley Berne: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
Down There on a Visit, by Christopher Isherwood: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
Drowning With Others, by James Dickey: *John Simon* 455
The Dublin Diary of Stanislaus Joyce, edited by George Harris Healey: *Vivian Mercier* 623
Duino Elegies, by R. M. Rilke, trans. by C. F. MacIntyre: *Robert Bly* .. 469
Eleven Kinds of Loneliness, by Richard Yates: *J. Mitchell Morse* ... 291
The Empty Canvas, by Alberto Moravia: *Roger Sale* 134
The End of It, by Mitchell Goodman: *Roger Sale* 134
The End of the Battle, by Evelyn Waugh: *Roger Sale* 134
The Estate of Poetry, by Edwin Muir: *Patrick Cruttwell* 451
Expositions and Developments, by Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft: *B. H. Haggin* 630
A Family's Affair, by Ellen Douglas: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
Fever & Chills, by George P. Elliott: *John Simon* 455

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For Love, by Robert Creeley: *John Simon* 455
The Founding of English Meter, by John Thompson: *Robert Lowell* . 317
The Fox in the Attic, by Richard Hughes: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
The Furnished Room, by Laura Del-Rivo: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
Garland for the Winter Solstice, by Ruthven Todd: *John Simon* 455
God Was Born in Exile, by Vintila Horia: *Roger Sale* 134
Going Away, by Clancy Sigal: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
The Golden Notebook, by Doris Lessing: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
Hells and Benefits, by Benjamin De-Mott: *Roger Sale* 605
The Hours Together, by Clara Winston: *Roger Sale* 134
A House for Mr. Biswas, by V. S. Naipaul: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
Imperatives, by Anthony Ostroff: *Cecil Hemley* 612
In the Clearing, by Robert Frost: *John Simon* 455
In the Interlude, by Boris Pasternak, trans. by Henry Kamen: *John Simon* 455
In Praise of Adam, by Reuel Denney: *John Simon* 455
Island, by Aldous Huxley: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
The Jacob's Ladder, by Denise Levertov: *John Simon* 455
Journey to a Known Place, by Hayden Carruth: *John Simon* 455
Key to the Door, by Alan Sillitoe: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
Labyrinths, by Jorge Luis Borges: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
The Letters of Oscar Wilde, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis: *Gerald Weales* 620
Letting Go, by Philip Roth: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
A Long and Happy Life, by Reynolds Price: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
The Marquise Went Out at Five, by Claude Mauriac: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
Memories and Commentaries, by Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft: *B. H. Haggin* 630
Morte d'Urban, by J. F. Powers: *Paul Levine* 598
Movie-Going and Other Poems, by John Hollander: *John Simon* ... 455
My Sad Captains, by Thom Gunn: *John Simon* 455
The New Romantics, by Richard Foster: *Roger Sale* 476
Night and Hope, by Arnost Lustig: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
Notes From a Dark Street. by Edward Adler: *J. Mitchell Morse* .. 291
Now Bless Thyself, by Elizabeth Sewell: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
Nude Descending a Staircase, by X. J. Kennedy: *John Simon* 455
The Old Men at the Zoo, by Angus Wilson: *Roger Sale* 134
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, by Ken Kesey: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
Pale Fire, by Vladimir Nabokov: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
The Papers of Andrew Melmoth, by Hugh Sykes Davies: *Roger Sale* .. 134
A Passion in Rome, by Morley Callaghan: *Roger Sale* 134
Patriotic Gore, by Edmund Wilson: *Marius Bewley* 431
Pictures from Brueghel, by William Carlos Williams: *John Simon* ... 455
Pigeon Feathers, by John Updike: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
Poem of the Cid, trans. by W. S. Merwin: *Robert Bly* 469
Poems, by Francis Fergusson: *John Simon* 455
Poems, by Barbara Guest: *John Simon* 455
Poems, 1947-1961, by Elizabeth Sewell: *Cecil Hemley* 612
Portrait in Brownstone, by Louis Auchincloss: *Patrick Cruttwell* .. 589
The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, by Muriel Spark: *Roger Sale* 134
The Proper Wit of Poetry, by George Williamson: *Patrick Cruttwell* . 451
A Radical's America, by Harvey Swados: *Marvin Mudrick* 439
The Reivers, by William Faulkner: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
Religion in Modern English Drama, by Gerald Weales: *Denis Donoghue* 154
The Rhetoric of Religion, Studies in Logolology, by Kenneth Burke: *Benjamin DeMott* 551
Riverside Drive, by Louis Simpson: *Robert Martin Adams* 420

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Sad Heart at the Supermarket, by Randall Jarrell: *Marvin Mudrick* 439
The Satires of Persius, trans. by W. S. Merwin: *Robert Bly* 469
The School of Donne, by A. Alvarez: *Patrick Cruttwell* 451
Selected Poems, by Francis Golffing: *John Simon* 455
Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda, trans. by Ben Bellitt: *Robert Bly* 469
Selected Works, Vol. II, Poetry, by R. M. Rilke, trans. by J. B. Leishman: *Robert Bly* 469
Ship of Fools, by Katherine Anne Porter: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, by Mark Schorer: *Marius Bewley* 143
The Sins of the Fathers, by Christian Geissler: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
The Slave, by I. B. Singer: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
The Soft Machine, by William Burroughs: *Robert Martin Adams* .. 420
Surface and Symbol: The Consistency of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, by Robert Martin Adams: *Vivian Mercier* 623
Tales of the Don, by Mikhail Sholokov: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
The Tangled Bank, by Stanley Edgar Hyman: *Benjamin DeMott* .. 551
The Tennis Court Oath, by John Ashbery: *John Simon* 455
Thank You and Other Poems, by Kenneth Koch: *John Simon* 455
The Thin Red Line, by James Jones: *Paul Levine* 598
Too Long in the West, by Balachandra Rajan: *J. Mitchell Morse* 291
Torse 3, by Christopher Middleton: *John Simon* 455
Traveling Through the Dark, by William Stafford: *Cecil Hemley* .. 612
Twenty Poems of Georg Trakl, trans. by James Wright and Robert Bly: *John Simon* 455
An Unofficial Rose, by Iris Murdoch: *Robert Martin Adams* 420
The Valley of Vision, by Peter F. Fisher: *Patrick Cruttwell* 451
A View of My Own, by Elizabeth Hardwick: *Roger Sale* 605
Views of Jeopardy, by Jack Gilbert: *John Simon* 455
Voyager Belsky, by Monroe Engel: *Paul Levine* 598
Water Street, by James Merrill: *Cecil Hemley* 612
What a Way to Go, by Wright Morris: *Paul Levine* 598
Wilderness, by Robert Penn Warren: *Roger Sale* 134
William Butler Yeats, The Lyric of Tragedy, by B. L. Reid: *Patrick Cruttwell* 451
The Wonderful Clouds, by Françoise Sagan: *Patrick Cruttwell* 589
A Working Friendship, the Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *B. H. Haggin* 630

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED